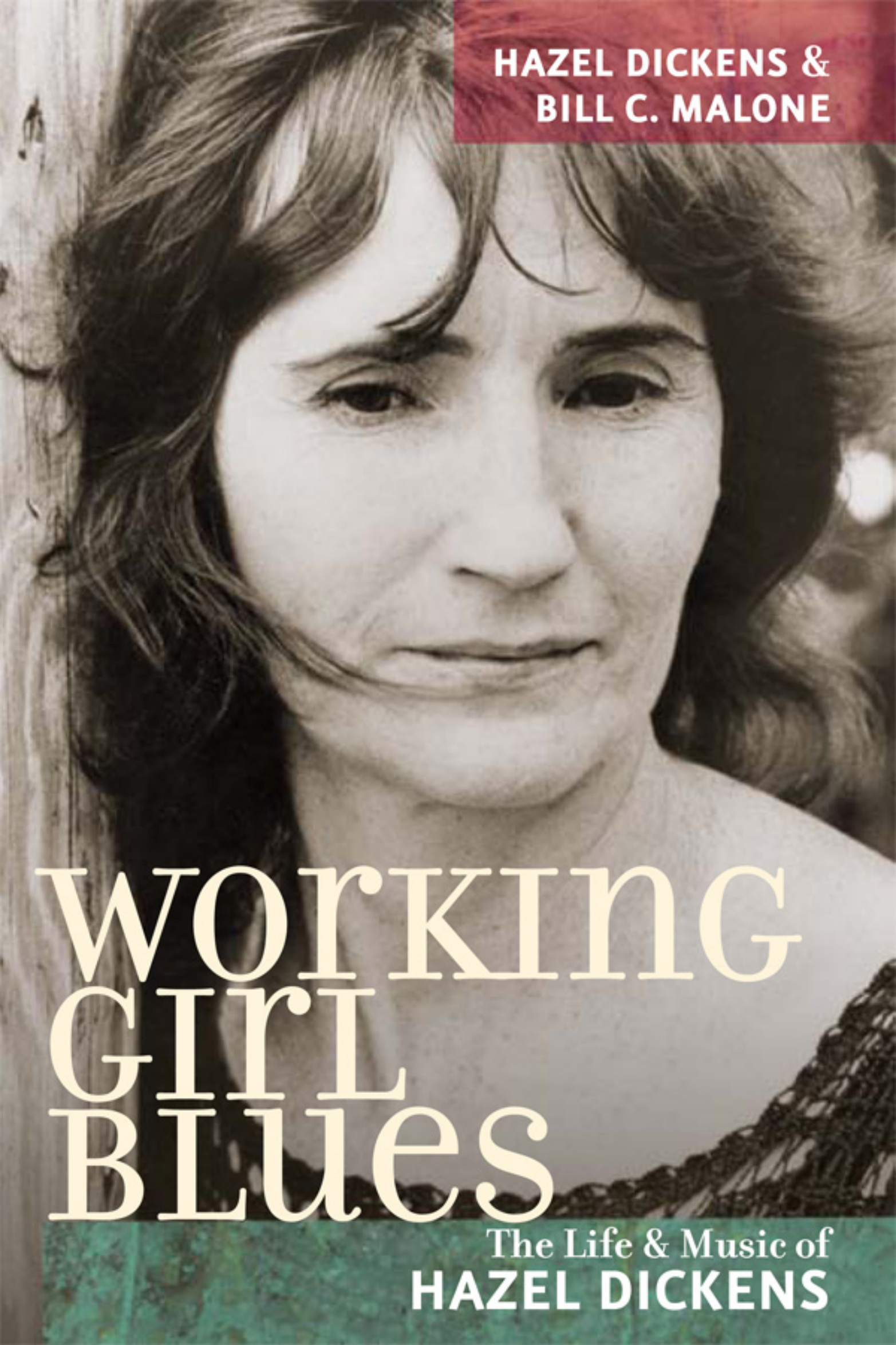
HAZEL DICKENS &
BILL C. MALONE
working
girl
blues
The Life & Music of
HAZEL DICKENS

# Working Girl Blues

MUSIC IN AMERICAN LIFE

A list of books in the series appears at the end of this book.

# Working Girl Blues

## The Life and Music of Hazel Dickens

*Hazel Dickens*
*and Bill C. Malone*

University of Illinois Press
Urbana and Chicago

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*Bill Malone dedicates this book to his wife, Bobbie, and to the memory of his mother, Maude Owens Malone.*

*Hazel Dickens, with fond memories, dedicates this book to her mother, Sarah Aldora Simpkins Dickens, and father, Hillary Nathan Dickens; and also to her ten brothers and sisters—with a special mention and dedication to her brother Arnold Lee Dickens, who shared her interest and passion for a music that will always ring in their souls.*

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# acknowledgments

Hazel Dickens's music has always stirred my soul, but the bulk of my knowledge about her career came through formal interviews, written exchanges, telephone conversations, and dialogues that the two of us had in seminars that I conducted in the spring of 2000 as a visiting professor at Duke University and the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill. The most gratifying aspect of this association, however, has been the opportunity to get to know her personally and to share the warmth of her friendship. It has been a pleasure for me to work with Hazel Dickens, one of America's premier traditional singers and musicians, in the preparation of this tribute to her long and distinguished career as a songwriter. I would also like to thank John Cohen, Alice Gerrard, Archie Green, Judy McCulloh, Tracy Schwarz, and Mike Seeger for their willingness to share their memories and insights about Hazel. Other sources of information are found in the endnotes to the introduction that I have written for this book.

—Bill C. Malone

I have admired and have been moved by Bill Malone's writing for many years. So, to have the honor and privilege to share a book with him is more than I could ever hope for. Thank you Bill for all your great writing and soulful insights and especially for the gift of your friendship—I shall always treasure it. A very special thank you to some dear music friends: Mike Seeger, Dudley Connell, Alice Gerrard, Tracy Schwarz, John Cohen, Barry Mitterhoff, Jack Leiderman, Richard Underwood, Lynn Morris, Marshall Wilborn, Ron Thomason—many "kudos" to Warren Hellman, David McLaughlin, Tom Adams, Tony Treschka; and to Rounder Records for a thirty-six-year relationship. A special thank you to Ken Irwin for all your support and friendship. Many thanks to all my loyal fans who have stood by me and given me hope through the years. I will not forget!

—Hazel Dickens

# Hazel Dickens
## A Brief Biography

*Bill C. Malone*

Hazel Dickens's compelling voice and eloquent songs first reached a large American public in the soundtrack of *Harlan County, USA,* a 1976 Academy Award–winning documentary film that told of a protracted and dramatic strike in the eastern Kentucky coalfields. During a graphic description of the ravages wrought by pneumoconiosis midway through the documentary, Hazel is heard singing her own composition, "Black Lung," a powerful elegy inspired by the death of her brother Thurman and other coal miners. Her voice—stark, keening, and persuasive—manages to convey both the suffering felt by generations of her kinsmen and her own outrage at the greed and neglect that produced such misery. There is no mistaking the sound we hear. It is not a pathetic wail, nor a dejected cry of despair. It is an angry call for justice.

Hazel Dickens's voice and vocal style are qualities that old-time music fans have recognized since the mid-1960s, when she joined with Alice Gerrard to break new ground for women in the field of bluegrass, a domain that had been notorious for its dominance by "good old boys." Hazel and Alice truly were "pioneering women,"[1] with passionate duets and searing songs that inspired women to invade this masculine province. Their seminal duets marked the beginning of what music historian and promoter Art Menius

approvingly described as "the feminization of bluegrass."[2] Hazel's career with Alice, though, was only the most recent phase of an almost lifetime of immersion in music. She shaped and honed her style in the rough clubs and honky-tonks of Baltimore and, before that, in the music she heard at home and in the Primitive Baptist churches of West Virginia.

Hazel Jane Dickens was born in Montcalm, Mercer County, West Virginia, on June 1, 1935, the eighth of eleven children (six boys and five girls) in the family of Hillary N. and Sarah Aldora Dickens. Mercer County lies at the southern extremity of the state, right on the border with Virginia, and not too far northeast of the storied coal seams of Harlan County, Kentucky, where Florence Reece first raised the question that always confronts us when we witness the victimization of the poor or working class: "Which Side Are You On?" Mercer County embodies the paradox of Appalachian coal country. While it is a land of stark natural beauty and abundant resources, the lives of its people have too often been sacrificed on the altar of corporate greed. Its beautiful hills and valleys once held massive deposits of bituminous coal, providing jobs for struggling farmers and immense wealth for a few entrepreneurs. The county's population, though, has declined steadily since the late 1950s, when mechanization and strip mining reduced the need for labor in the mines.

According to family lore, the Dickens clan is related to the famous British novelist, Charles Dickens. Such an association seems fitting. Both Hazel and her distant British kinsman have had compassionate concerns for the poor and fine critical eyes for the details of working-class life. Unlike the perspective of the great English writer, who knew the downtrodden largely as a sympathetic outsider, Hazel's awareness comes from wholly within that culture, as a sensitive and discerning child of the poor. Her father, Hillary (generally known as H. N.), cut and sold timber for mine roofing, and her brothers, brothers-in-law, and cousins worked in the mines. She grew up seeing her brothers march off to the mines each morning and return in the evening with their faces and clothes covered with coal dust. Well before she left the hills of home, Hazel had learned an even more searing truth: that the coal dust had also seeped into their lungs.

Hardworking men like her father and brothers were exploited for their labor but were undervalued as human beings. Except when they exercised their rights at the polls or walked off their jobs to demand better treatment

from their bosses, they had little voice in society. H. N. was able to exercise his authority outside of the workplace in two areas where working-class men could dominate: home and pulpit. At home, he was a stern, unyielding husband and father who asserted total and unquestioned command over his household. In the Primitive Baptist church, he was an eloquent preacher and a strong singer, and his congregation valued his leadership. During the brief moments of his sermon, no one could question his authority or his worth.

Mother Sarah was quiet, submissive, and almost always deferential to her husband. She devoted her life to all of her eleven children, but was particularly close to her frail and sickly daughter Hazel. Hazel describes the incident that epitomized and strengthened that relationship in her comments about her award-winning song, "Mama's Hand." Fearing for the life of her three-month-old daughter, who would not take her mother's milk, Sarah bundled Hazel up, carried her across the mountain to the railhead, and successfully sought out the aid of a doctor in a nearby town. The close bond that developed between mother and daughter is memorialized not only in the song written by Hazel, but also in another one inspired by the incident called "Carry Me across the Mountain."[3]

The Dickens family sought, found, and affirmed its identity through religion and music. Hazel insists that she is not very religious, and has in fact written and recorded very few religious songs. But it is easy to see the ways in which religion shaped her life and musical style. The theology of the Primitive Baptist church permeated her youth. Primitive Baptists stress the fellowship of the original New Testament church and practice a direct simplicity reflected in their unadorned church buildings and rituals. Unlike most of their Protestant brethren in the South, they reject evangelism, arguing that God has already predestined people's fates. Church services, led by unordained preachers, dwell on the fellowship of believers and the unlimited majesty of God. Rejecting any man-made idea or institution that is not explicitly sanctioned by the Bible, Primitive Baptists exclude musical instruments from their church services. They believe that the human voice is the only instrument required for the worship of God.

Hazel eventually rejected the strictures of the church, feeling that the fatalism inherent in its theology and the tendency to attribute all good things to the wondrous workings of God diminished the worth and potential of

human beings. She felt that such a restrictive theology inhibited people, preventing them from seeing the utility of their own actions. On the other hand, she revered the democracy of the church and recalls with great affection the fellowship and love exhibited by church people for each other—the communion and camaraderie, for example, exhibited by the "brothers" and "sisters" as they greeted each other on Sunday mornings or repaired to each other's homes for a noon meal. And, of course, she was powerfully impressed by the rough and lusty expression of equality heard in the music of the church. Singers generally sang in unison, eschewing harmony probably because they felt that "pretty singing" glorified the singer instead of the song and its spiritual message. Hazel vividly recalls the powerful singing of her father, regretting that she has never been able to replicate his manner of dwelling on notes and "turning" the syllables in marvelous ways. Songs heard in church—such as "Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah" and "When I Can Read My Titles Clear"—taken most often from D. H. Goble's venerable songbook, *Primitive Baptist Hymn Book* (1887), glorified God and noted the futility of man's actions. Primitive Baptist lyrics reminded worshipers of the evanescence of life, the certainty of death, and the promise of heavenly reward. This was a tough-minded religion entirely appropriate to the spiritual needs of a people who lived hard and unadorned lives.

Like religion, music insinuated itself into Hazel's consciousness from the very beginning. The music of the church was important, but it was not the only force that shaped her life. H. N. had been a strong drop-thumb banjo player in his youth, and his religious convictions did not prevent him from loving and appreciating the music of this world. Hazel awakened each morning to the music of the radio, played loudly because H. N. loved it that way. He was particularly fond of any kind of music that featured the banjo. Consequently, musicians such as Uncle Dave Macon, Lily May Ledford, and Cousin Emmy (Joy May Carver) ranked high in his pantheon. Above all, he encouraged music among his children. The family listened to the *Grand Ole Opry* on Saturday nights and to the Carter Family on Mexican border broadcasts. Hazel still cherishes the Carter Family's music. Her guitar style is modeled on that of Maybelle Carter, and she regularly includes songs from the Carter Family repertoire in her concerts. The radio also brought more modern country songs into the Dickens's household, and by the time Hazel left home for Baltimore, she and her brothers had become immersed in

the music of people like Roy Acuff, the Callahan Brothers, the Blue Sky Boys, the Louvin Brothers, Bill Monroe, and Ernest Tubb.

Hazel exhibited her own musical talents quite early. Her father loved to hear her sing "Man of Constant Sorrow"; when she was a small child, he called her out often (generally to the embarrassment of the shy young girl) to sing the song for visitors and relatives. She also recalls singing an Ernest Tubb song, "I'd Die before I'd Cry over You," in one of her elementary school classes, to the considerable consternation of her teacher, who had hoped for something with a bit more "quality" to it. Hazel clearly loved a broad range of country music, from the very traditional to the honky-tonk melodies of Texas. To this day she still proudly displays on the wall of her apartment a framed picture of the great Texas country and western singer George Jones. Very early in her life, Hazel also began collecting songs, some painstakingly written down in composition books and others clipped from the pages of song magazines. This immersion in song lyrics soon inspired Hazel's attempts to write her own songs, a portent of the distinguished career that lay ahead of her. By the time she left home in 1954, she had already acquired a vast repertory of songs learned from family, the radio, and magazines like *Country Song Roundup*.

Although religion could sustain folks through hard times and music could provide diversion, neither could forestall the disintegration of the Dickens family's way of life and the breakup of their home. The mechanization of the coal industry after World War II and the consequent spread of hard times accentuated the flight of mountain folk to the industrial promises of Cincinnati, Akron, Dayton, Detroit, and other northern cities. After 110 years of uninterrupted growth, the population of Mercer County peaked at 78,000 in 1950. Things went from bad to worse during the grim 1950s as coal production became dominated by strip mining, and Mercer County lost population during the next four decades. The Dickens family moved frequently, usually to smaller houses, and finally into a sharecropper's shack consisting of three rooms: a kitchen, a living room where her father's bed was, and another room "full of beds" where everyone else slept. One by one, members of the Dickens clan began to relocate to Baltimore, one of the most popular destinations for transplanted West Virginia hill folk.

Eventually, even H. N. and Sarah made the move to join their children in the city but found no real comfort or economic security there. Hazel

briefly had joined the exodus to the city in about 1951 at the age of sixteen. Then, after returning to West Virginia a short time later, she made a permanent move in 1954. Her sister Velvie, who had been living and working in Baltimore since the war (first as a shipyard welder and later as a factory hand), encouraged her to move, telling her about all the creature comforts that were available in the city. Adorned in a new dress that her brother Dan bought for her at the company store, Hazel "said good-bye to that plain little mining town" and caught a Greyhound bus to Baltimore. Like many migrants, she abandoned the old home with mixed feelings; often "in the dead of the night and the still and the quiet," poignant memories returned, summoning up those ancient, dark mountains and the sight of her mother waving good-bye from the doorway as Hazel left their house to go to the bus station.

Baltimore was both exciting and forbidding. Hazel first lived with Velvie at Eutaw Place in a neighborhood of row houses that had been built earlier in the century for workers who toiled in the sail-making industry. When Hazel began making a little money, initially as a housekeeper and waitress and then as an operative in the Continental Can factory, she moved to an apartment in a neighborhood called Lower Charles Village. These neighborhoods were often described as "Little Appalachia," and Hazel lived among people very much like herself, and found comfort in their familiar dialects and customs. Despite the presence of a support network made up of people from back home, Baltimore remained a lonely, and sometimes hostile, place for a young woman who had grown up in the country. She recalls that when she first set out to find an apartment, she actually saw a sign on a building that said "No dogs or Hillbillies." Hazel came from a society that discouraged women from expressing themselves. She was an intelligent young woman, but had only gone through the seventh grade. She was sensitive, with good instincts and a latent social consciousness, but she was aware of the limitations of her education and was hesitant to divulge her deepest thoughts. Like her father, she tended to repress her feelings for long periods and then might explode in a paroxysm of anger. When she ventured out of her neighborhood, she was self-conscious about the clothes she wore, her accent, and her manners. She now speaks often of her lack of socialization back in the hills; that is, the fact that she had lived a largely

isolated life, had developed few skills of interpersonal communication, and had been discouraged from expressing herself freely.

Fortunately, mentors emerged who taught Hazel how to relate to other people and how to acquire the skills necessary for survival in the new urban world. Above all, her mentors encouraged her to be confident about her own abilities. The most important of these was Alyse Taubman. Taubman was a Jewish social worker and part-time fiddler who had rejected the wealth enjoyed by her parents and had instead opted for the unorthodox lifestyle and cultural tastes of the local bohemian community. When Hazel first met her, Alyse lived with her husband, Willie Foshag, in a third-floor walkup apartment in a working-class neighborhood. At that time, Alyse was working on her degree in social work; they subsisted on the pay earned by Foshag from his current military service. She drove a Volkswagen and furnished her apartment with used furniture, much of which had been borrowed from an older and more prosperous sister. Her disapproving father, in fact, had once remarked that Alyse was his "chief contribution to charity"! She opened her home to music sessions and political and artistic discussions, and was acutely interested in the problems faced by rural migrants in Baltimore. Her home became one of the popular forums in the city where country and urban people met and shared their experiences. "Alyse," Hazel declares, "was a big mentor in my life. I think the music saved me, but she did a lot to make me a different person too." Hazel told Bill Friskics-Warren that Taubman's "support and friendship, one of the closest I've ever had, was just what I needed."[4]

The Dickens family fascinated Alyse, in large part because they also played music. Hazel said that Taubman "had never met anybody like us." Listening intently to the political and social discussions that took place in Alyse's house, but not ready to participate in them, Hazel absorbed a wealth of ideas and perspectives: "I didn't know what they were talking about, but I tried hard to learn. I got to hear about this other way of life, and found another way to think. I just exploded during that period. I had it all stored up, like a sponge, taking everything in. It was the beginning of me being politicized."

Alyse was crucial to Hazel's socialization, but music was her salvation. She and her brothers first made music at home and then in the house par-

ties that flourished in Baltimore. Through her brother Arnold, Hazel met a second significant mentor, Mike Seeger. Seeger had arrived in Baltimore in May 1954 and, as a conscientious objector to the Korean War, had begun a stint of "community service" as a kitchen orderly at the Mt. Wilson Tuberculosis Sanatorium. He quickly let it be known at the hospital—where he was also living and where Hazel's brother Robert was a patient—that he played music. That was quite an understatement. Seeger was just twenty-one and had been playing the guitar only since he was eighteen. But by the time he came to Baltimore, he was playing just about anything with strings on it and was on the way to becoming an extraordinary student of the music he played and sang. Robert introduced Mike to his brother Arnold, and disclosed that his family was musical. Seeger soon visited the Dickens home and brought Hazel a new dimension of musical awareness and creativity.

Born in New York City in 1933, Seeger had grown up in the household of Charles and Ruth Crawford Seeger, prominent classical composers and ethnomusicologists, and was the half brother of the charismatic protest singer Pete Seeger. The family moved to the Washington, D.C., area in 1935, when Charles Seeger began working as a folk music consultant for the New Deal's Resettlement Administration. Mother Ruth was similarly involved; she made musical transcriptions for a book of folksongs, *Our Singing Country,* compiled by John and Alan Lomax. Almost from infancy Mike had been immersed in the traditional music that his parents documented and studied. Library of Congress recordings and old 78 rpm commercial records of hillbilly and other roots styles were as important to his childhood as toys were. He began to listen to commercial country music, particularly its older forms, when he was a high school student in Chevy Chase, Maryland. At that time, country music was not yet rigidly subdivided into subgenres, with what is now called bluegrass played alongside other types of country music at concerts, on radio broadcasts, and in jukeboxes. By listening to the local radio broadcasts of country music and bluegrass in the D.C. area and hearing the informed commentary of disk jockeys like Don Owens and Curley Smith, Seeger began to see the connections between traditional styles and modern commercial country music. Two young friends from the Washington area, Pete Kuykendall and Richard Spottswood, who were avid record collectors and fans of roots-style music, indoctrinated him on the fine points of early bluegrass history and style.[5]

Mike's urban middle-class experience, however, had never really permitted him to have much intimate contact with the working-class folks who made the music that he had come to love. This all changed in Baltimore, a working-class city that was teeming with people fresh from the rural hinterlands. As a cultural bridge, the TB sanatorium proved to be as important to Seeger as it was to the Dickens siblings. Robert Dickens played a kind of hillbilly ragtime style on the mandolin that hearkened back to an earlier, pre-bluegrass period of country music. The first meeting with the Dickens clan, as Mike recalls it, was in the apartment of H. N. and Sarah Dickens, who had relocated in Baltimore at Eutaw Place, near Charles and Calvert streets. Hazel was living nearby with her sister, but came over to her parents' house because she was "curious about this guy" who wanted to meet them. Remembering the insults that she had often suffered from people in the big city, Hazel responded to Mike with extreme wariness, and recalls that she first "checked him out" cautiously and tried to figure out why this "Northerner" was so interested in her family. At one point, when Mike and Arnold were picking and singing, she turned up the volume on a country music radio show to which she was listening and loudly declared, "*This* is what it should really sound like." They smiled at her abruptness, kept on playing, and were soon joined by Hazel. Mike declares that he was immediately impressed with both Hazel's singing and by her commitment to the music. She brought out her songbooks, including the few tentative efforts that she had been making toward writing her own songs. Mike remembers Hazel as being both shy and assertive in those years, self-effacing in her personal behavior but boldly expressive in her singing and choice of songs. Here, he believed, was a woman with an inner reservoir of strength and wisdom that was too often masked by her reserved exterior.

Mike, Hazel, Arnold, and Robert Dickens began playing at home and in other informal settings. But the public performance bug quickly bit them. Thinking of the local honky-tonk scene, Robert would say, "Let's go put in a personal appearance." Often that meant nothing more than standing in the corner of some club, picking and singing and hoping that someone would pitch some money in the kitty. Hazel jokingly named the band the West Virginia Ramblers and became its spokesperson because the others were reluctant to talk very much in public. Occasionally, they would pack a lunch and drive to the country music parks at New River Ranch and Sunset

Park in Maryland and Pennsylvania, hoping to hear Bill Monroe or the Stanley Brothers or to get in a little picking time themselves.[6] Ola Belle Reed, a North Carolina–born singer and banjo player and the proprietor of New River Ranch, was a vital role model for Hazel with her strong singing of such eloquent songs as "High on a Mountain" and "I've Endured." The parks were crucial cultural meeting grounds for northern fans who came from the metropolitan centers of the East and rural folk who came from the contiguous areas of the Upper South. Although she knew how to play the guitar, Hazel soon learned that she could get more jobs playing the bass fiddle, so she learned that instrument as well. Her first real band experience came with the Pike County Boys, a group headed by Bobby Baker on guitar and including Mike Seeger on fiddle, Dickie Rittler on banjo, and Bob Shanklin on mandolin.

Like Washington, D.C., Baltimore was in the throes of a musical revolution in the late fifties. On the cusp of the folk revival, the city served as an incubator of the emerging bluegrass phenomenon. Fledgling bluegrass bands like the Pike County Boys, more seasoned groups like Earl Taylor and the Stoney Mountain Boys, and veteran professional acts like Bill Monroe and the Stanley Brothers played in bars like the Cozy Inn, the Blue Jay, and the 79 Club, small establishments with makeshift stages and a jukebox. This was the music scene, in fact, that inspired folklorist Alan Lomax when, in an *Esquire* article in 1959, he described bluegrass as "folk music with overdrive."[7]

The years in the Baltimore clubs provided a great learning experience for Hazel. She was intrigued by the young city fans and the musicians, like Mike Seeger, who loved the music that she made. Mike was the first person from outside her life experience who appreciated the music that she had always loved. He had, in short, "validated" her culture.[8] Seeger, on the other hand, is just as quick to acknowledge the transforming experience that Hazel and the rural musicians that he came to know and admire in Baltimore exerted on his own life. In the clubs and parties of that city, Hazel saw how music could bring people together, promote identity, and provide emotional release. But recalling those days at the Cozy Inn and other clubs, she understood but was dismayed at the frustration and machismo exhibited by the good old boys from the country, who asserted their manhood in a world that was slipping from their grasp. These displaced souls were in the city,

but not yet of it. Underpaid, overworked, and powerless in many ways, they found a bar on almost every corner in Baltimore and they drank too much, sometimes fought each other, and harassed women. Hazel keenly observed the ways women were treated. If women came to the bars, men treated them as if they were prostitutes, talking about them behind their backs while trying to exploit them sexually. Hazel did not drink. She nursed her cokes, played and sang her music as well as she could, and then went home—alone.

The men from the North tended to be more appreciative of her talents and more accepting of her as a person than were her Southern male counterparts who felt threatened by her assertiveness, self-confidence, and intelligence. "I had one thing that most of the good old boys didn't have. I had a mind. I had every song that you could think of in my head, and they didn't. People were always asking me for the words of songs, and I could sing them authentically, just the way they were supposed to be sung." She added, "The men who did accept me were the ones that wanted to learn, the ones from the North. I had that in my corner. They all wanted to learn and sing with me. So I never lacked an audience, particularly among the revivalists and city people. But the good old boys, they weren't ready to move over and give me room."

The seeds of Hazel's women's songs, then, did not germinate in the larger field of American feminism, nor did they arise through conscious identification with the women's movement. They first flowered in the honky-tonks of Baltimore, a product of the treatment she received from many of her fellow musicians and from club owners who often paid her less than they gave to the male members of the band. The songs also stemmed from her awareness of the abuse suffered by other women in her own family and by those who came to or worked in the clubs. She said, "I didn't have to work in a factory to see how badly women were treated. Playing in bluegrass, a male-dominated form of music, was enough." She eventually memorialized these experiences in some of her greatest songs, perhaps most poignantly in "Don't Put Her Down, You Helped Put Her There."

Hazel's evolution toward greater individual assertiveness came, ironically, during her partnership with Alice Gerrard.[9] Alice was born in Seattle but grew up near Oakland, California, in a family that loved music but was totally indifferent toward traditional or country styles. Bach, not bluegrass,

was the reigning musical passion of her household. Her mother and older sisters had sung professionally in a group called the Symphony Sisters. When Alice entered Antioch College in Ohio in 1956, she began hearing various forms of folk music and was hooked for life when she encountered, first, a version of "One Morning in May" by the great Virginia traditional singer Texas Gladden, and then the legendary collection of southern roots styles found in Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music.*[10] Participation in an Antioch co-op program in Washington, D.C., where she was placed in contact with "real-life" situations, put her in the middle of an active scene of old-time and bluegrass performance, both amateur and professional; through her boyfriend, Jeremy Foster (whom she later married), she met Mike Seeger. Alice has no clear recollection of where she and Hazel met, but Hazel is positive that the meeting occurred on Eager Street in Baltimore in a room below Alyse Taubman's apartment and on the same floor where Mike lived.

Hazel and Alice did not sing together for quite some time after this first meeting. But when they eventually combined their voices in harmony, they found remarkable compatibility as singers. As unlikely as this musical partnership between the city girl and the mountain girl might have appeared, Alice's husky and soulful contralto voice meshed perfectly with Hazel's ringing tenor, convincingly reinforcing each other's individual strengths. Their penchant for interesting and rare songs, drawn from the folk revivals and old-time country music, made the duo favorites at picking parties in the Baltimore–Washington, D.C., area.

Except for a well-received performance in 1962 at the venerable old-time fiddlers' contest in Galax, Virginia, where they performed mostly Carter Family songs with autoharp and guitar, their musical activities for several years remained confined largely to the active house party scene of Baltimore and Washington. But one night in 1964, at a party in Virginia, David Grisman and Peter Siegel heard the duo and arranged an audition for them with Moe Asch of Folkways Records. The subsequent recording session, held in Pierce Hall of the First Unitarian Church in Washington, marked the real beginning of the team of Hazel and Alice. Featuring a stellar array of bluegrass musicians—Grisman on mandolin, Lamar Grier on five-string banjo, and Chubby Wise on fiddle—an LP called *Who's That Knocking?* (Verve/Folkways 9005) appeared in 1965. Although Hazel contributed one song called

"Cowboy Jim" and verses for another, "Gabriel's Call," to which Jeremy, Alice, and Marj Seeger (Mike's wife) had already supplied a chorus, most of the songs on their first LP came from traditional sources, including five songs borrowed from the Carter Family. This recording was followed by another session that same year, but the resulting LP, *Won't You Come and Sing for Me?* (Folkways 31034), was not released until 1973. Folkways recorded a wonderful assortment of grassroots styles in the 1940s and 1950s, but seemed content to place its records mostly in libraries. Marketing was not its forte or desire.

After the release of the first Folkways LP, Hazel entered the busiest period of her life. The years between the issuance of the two Folkways items, from 1965 to 1973, saw a period of personal growth and social maturation, and it was a time of incredible artistic production. In 1965, Hazel married Joe Cohen, an easygoing youth counselor, taxi driver, and folk music fan. At the time, both were in retreat from the cultures in which they grew up. When they divorced in 1968, both of them were moving back toward the cultural roots from which they had strayed: Cohen expressed a renewed interest in Judaism and even talked about moving to a kibbutz in Israel, and Hazel, in turn, began to overcome her embarrassment about her rural roots and to commemorate them in some of her most stirring songs.

After her divorce, she moved in late 1969 to an apartment in Washington, D.C., deliberately choosing a scene of semi-isolation and privacy where she could devote her time to songwriting. She took a job as manager of a retail store, Old Mexico Imports; she said that holding down a regular job allowed her to support her music habit. Working in the privacy of her little apartment, Hazel entered a period of great creativity, turning out some of her most important songs, such as "Black Lung," "Mannington Mine Disaster" (inspired by a tragic incident in Farmington, West Virginia, in 1968, that took the lives of seventy-eight miners), and "Working Girl Blues," which first began to take shape one day while she was taking inventory at Old Mexico Imports. In the liner notes of the album on which the song first appeared, she dedicated it "to all working class people" and noted that the song was the result of "remembering and reliving all the bad jobs I've held from the time I was sixteen."[11]

The retreat to the solitude of her apartment did not in any sense signal a disengagement from the world, nor did her divorce sour her relationship

with men. The breakup with Joe and, more important, the tragic marital unhappiness experienced by some of her sisters made her wary of another marriage. But she has enjoyed significant friendships with men such as Mike Seeger, Ralph Rinzler, Dudley Connell, and Tracy Schwarz, and she has had a long and intimate companionship with Ken Irwin, one of the cofounders of Rounder Records. Professionally, she sang frequently with Alice as a duo (under the name Hazel and Alice) and found that an almost cultlike following was developing around their music. Their passionate, spine-tingling harmonies and interesting repertory of songs attracted tradition-minded bluegrass fans. The ultimate mark of acceptance came when bluegrass patriarch Bill Monroe expressed his appreciation for their music and gave them one of his songs, "The One I Love Is Gone." Ron Thomason, mandolin player and leader of the Dry Branch Fire Squad, speaks for many people when he declares that Hazel and Alice brought back "the chill, the feeling of excitement and the power" that he had felt years earlier when he first discovered bluegrass music.[12] Many women, both within and outside the bluegrass genre, became emboldened to pursue careers in music by hearing or observing the performances of the duo.

After 1967, Hazel and Alice became part of the Strange Creek Singers, a larger organization led by Mike Seeger. Mike and Alice had married and were living in Pennsylvania (Jeremy Foster had died in an automobile accident in 1964). Composed of Seeger, Alice, Hazel, Lamar Grier, and Tracy Schwarz, the Strange Creek Singers borrowed its name from a stream in Braxton County, West Virginia, but was headquartered in Pennsylvania. The group performed irregularly, but gave occasional performances in clubs and festivals; they did make one tour on the West Coast in 1974 and one in Europe in 1975 where they visited Germany, Switzerland, France, England, Northern Ireland, and Sweden. Performing with the Strange Creek Singers at such venues as the Brandywine Folk Festival in Delaware gave Hazel exposure before an audience that was substantially different from the bluegrass crowd. These were the "folkniks"—those who valued what they *thought* was traditional music. At Brandywine and similar gatherings, Hazel sometimes reached far back in her cultural memory to perform a traditional English ballad such as "Little Margaret." The reception of such performances supported a fact that was becoming crucial in Hazel's evolving career: her appeal to an audience that was made up of varying constituencies.

The Strange Creek Singers made only one album. Recorded in 1969 and 1970 and released on the Arhoolie label in 1972, it included the earliest recorded version of Hazel's a cappella performance of her grim expression of social protest, "Black Lung."[13]

A major milestone in Hazel's emerging politicization and growing social consciousness was her involvement with the Southern Folk Cultural Revival Project, which was created in 1966 as an arm of the civil rights movement by Bernice Johnson Reagon, now professor emeritus at American University and founder of the gospel singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock, and Anne Romaine. Reagon and Romaine conceived of the Revival Project as a force that would combine the musical talents of white and black Southerners who would perform before integrated audiences in the South. Until her death on October 26, 1995 (from a ruptured appendix), Anne Romaine was a close friend and mentor of Hazel. Born Dorothy Anne Cooke on November 1, 1942, in Atlanta, Georgia, Romaine grew up in a family imbued with a Presbyterian mission heritage. She became passionately engaged in civil rights during her attendance at the University of Virginia and after she married the radical activist Howard Romaine. Hazel and Alice joined the project in 1967, becoming part of a revolving cast of black and white musicians (such as Dock Boggs, Roscoe Holcomb, Dewey Balfa, Johnny Shines, Mike Seeger, and others) who made two tours per year, one in the Deep South and one in the Upper South. This experience was liberating for Hazel because it permitted her to sing songs that expressed her social concern. Performing alongside and in front of working-class people like herself, Hazel once again became attached to her southern roots. "For a while I was going through this thing where I was rebelling against anything that had to do with the South, and with myself too, and my family and things that my family had gone through." Involvement with the project transformed these feelings of inadequacy into a source of strength. In remarks made to Bruce Shapiro in 1982, Hazel declared that "the tour gave me the support I needed not to be ashamed of being from a poor family."[14]

Although her inhibitions about singing overtly political material lessened considerably during these tours,[15] Hazel had already received legitimization as a spokesperson for working people's rights through her appearances at coal-mining songs symposia at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. Her appearances there were at the invitation of Ralph Rinzler, the director of the

festival and a dedicated champion of traditional music who earlier had presented Doc Watson and Bill Monroe to northern folk revival audiences. Rinzler and Hazel had become fast friends after their mutual friend, Mike Seeger, introduced them at a Bill Monroe concert at New River Ranch. Rinzler was deeply impressed with Hazel because she combined the style and sensibility of a mountain singer with a passion for social justice. She was, in short, a modern-day equivalent of Sarah Ogan Gunning and Aunt Molly Jackson. Hazel, for her part, had originally been drawn to Rinzler because of their mutual enthusiasm for the music of Bill Monroe, but she soon discovered that they also shared a similar commitment to human rights. She has since said of their relationship, "We were pretty much on the same page when it came to politics and social justice, and of course music was the glue that kept it all together."

Hazel wrote "Black Lung" late in 1969, and introduced it that year at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. It was the item that did most to put her in contact with people who were committed to social justice and working people's rights. She sang the song on November 21, 1970, at Horse Creek in Clay County, Kentucky, during a meeting sponsored by a grassroots organization called Mountain People's Rights that called attention to the failure of coal companies in Clay and other eastern Kentucky counties to pay the benefits of black lung victims. Her song came from deep personal experience: the trauma of witnessing her brother Thurman die of the affliction, with no funds to pay his medical expenses. As she painfully recollects, "I think watching him die this horrible death really took a toll on me and the way I thought. He was born, lived, and died poor, and didn't even have enough to bury himself." The Horse Creek meeting, and Hazel's performance, received *New York Times* coverage and won featured exposure on CBS-TV during Walter Cronkite's *Evening News.*

As a consequence of the publicity garnered by the Horse Creek meeting, Hazel began to receive many requests to sing her songs at union meetings and other related political events. She also became inspired to write other political ballads. "Clay County Miner," in fact, was written as soon as she got home from the Horse Creek meeting. "I'd never seen that many disabled and poor people at one time in one place. I didn't think I'd ever see some of them again." Soon thereafter, at a United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) meeting in Huntington, West Virginia, she received further vali-

dation of her dawning mission to sing the songs of struggling working-class folk: "I remember seeing people from my background that talked like me. They were out there in the workforce challenging the people that employed them. I remember the feeling that came over me when they got up to the microphone to talk."

In 1972, singer-activist Guy Carawan invited Hazel to participate in a series of Appalachian music workshops, concentrating on coal mining, at Highlander Folk Center in New Market, Tennessee. The experience brought her into intimate contact with other people who were active battlers for working-class justice, and resulted in an LP called *Come All You Coal Miners* (Rounder 4005). Hazel recorded four of her own songs, "Black Lung," "Cold-Blooded Murder," "Clay County Miner," and "Mannington Mine Disaster." Hazel met and sang with such legendary balladeers as Sarah Ogan Gunning and Florence Reece, the writer of the great labor anthem, "Which Side Are You On?" The association with Sarah Gunning may have contributed to Hazel's emotional loosening up, because Sarah talked a "blue streak" and readily gave vent to her opinions. Reece, on the other hand, is fondly remembered as "this little old white-haired lady, who looked like she might have just walked out of her kitchen." The young people who stood around her, basking in her every word, reminded Hazel of little birds yearning to be fed.

Hazel's growing prominence as a social activist and singer of protest songs inspired the affiliation of Hazel and Alice with the Rounder record company. The Rounder label was only about a year old in 1971, with a mere handful of records in its catalog, when Ken Irwin heard Hazel perform at a coal-mining song workshop at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. A trio of young radicals afire with the passion for social justice (Irwin, Bill Nowlin, and Marian Leighton), known as the Rounder Collective, had organized the label. Irwin had never heard the music of Hazel and Alice, but he was swept away by what he heard at the workshop—Hazel's blend of working-class authenticity and social consciousness. His reaction is reminiscent of that felt in the 1930s by young radicals like Alan Lomax and Pete Seeger when they first encountered Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly. Irwin recalls that "we were right out of the 60s, very political and concerned about injustice." When he approached Hazel about the possibility of making a record, she told him that she didn't make records without the support of "this other

woman I sing with" (i.e., Alice). So Irwin and the other Rounder folks went to a Labor Day festival in Delaware and met with both Hazel and Alice. Hazel was no stranger to "northern hippies" because she had worked and communed with them since her days in Baltimore, but she admits that she was initially bemused by this little band of enthusiasts who had become fascinated by southern roots music, and even had a touch of misgiving when she saw them peddling their records from the back of a Volkswagen bus.

Hazel and Alice's first recording session for Rounder came in 1972, and the resulting album, *Hazel and Alice,* was released in 1973. Its issuance inspired Folkways to release their second Hazel and Alice album. Rounder had limited funds but, unlike Folkways, it tried to market its material as broadly as possible. More than any other release, this first Rounder recording contributed to the mystique surrounding the women. It also won for them still another audience—feminists. Although bluegrass traditionalists and old-time music fans were very pleased with the sound and content of the album, women tended to be most passionate in their response. It was highly gratifying, and inspiring, to find an album that featured two women presenting material that they themselves had produced, and it was intriguing to hear Hazel singing in a high tenor style that previously had been the province of men like Ira Louvin and Bill Monroe. Although Hazel and Alice inspired such musicians as Lynn Morris, Rhonda Vincent, Laurie Lewis, Carol Elizabeth Jones, and Dale Ann Bradley to try their hands in the bluegrass business, their influence was not confined to that genre. Emmylou Harris, for example, borrowed directly from the duo's repertoire, and Naomi Judd became convinced from hearing the album that a musical career would be feasible for her and her daughter Christina. Sometime in 1975, Naomi paid a dollar for a used copy of the first Rounder record in a store in Berea, Kentucky, and when she and her daughter listened to it, they were impressed by Hazel and Alice's spunky independence and by their singing of such songs as "The Sweetest Gift, a Mother's Smile." Recalling the incident, Naomi said, "What a concept, a record with two women singing together! We became absolutely transfixed. It was the sound of the Kentucky hills where I grew up."[16] In the 1980s, Naomi and Christina (now renamed Wynonna) built a prominent career in mainstream country music as the Judds.

Hazel and Alice soon discovered that their songs had done more than move women to attempt musical careers; the songs were also becoming part of the soundtrack of the feminist movement. At least four songs on the first Rounder album defended the rights of women and made spirited assertions of feminine independence: Alice's "Custom-Made Woman Blues" and three songs written by Hazel, "Pretty Bird" (performed by Hazel alone in an a cappella style), "My Better Years" (inspired by the rupture of her marriage in 1969 and her rejection of her husband's efforts to reconcile), and "Don't Put Her Down, You Helped Put Her There." In 1974, Hazel and Alice gave a concert for the Folksong Society of Greater Boston, and found that the nature of their audiences had changed significantly. The society's traditional membership believed in practicing proper decorum when a concert was given, but they were accustomed to singing along with the performers. Mike Seeger, for example, had been severely unnerved during an earlier concert when the crowd sang along with him on his first five numbers. He finally had to resort to a Jew's harp solo to get them to stop singing. On the night of their Boston appearance, Hazel and Alice found the small auditorium packed, with some people standing and others sitting cross-legged on the floor. The regular members of the society were highly disconcerted and distraught at the new people who had invaded their domain and who were so enthusiastic about Hazel and Alice that they cheered and hooted in an unbecoming manner. "Who are these people?" they wondered. The newcomers, of course, were feminists who had been won over by Hazel and Alice's music and who looked upon them as heroes. Hazel and Alice had gained a new audience without consciously seeking to do so. They had never identified with the feminist movement, and in fact claimed to know little about it. They were pleased with this new support, but were sometimes disconcerted by the anti-male feelings that were expressed. On at least one occasion, in New York, they arrived to give a concert and found that men had been excluded.

In planning their second Rounder release, Ken Irwin was conscious that Hazel and Alice were reaching well beyond the bluegrass mainstream. Aware of the press that Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, and their cohorts were receiving in the early 1970s because of their maverick and independent-minded behavior, and realizing that young fans were gravitating toward

such artists, Irwin conceived a marketing campaign that would present Hazel and Alice as "female outlaws." But shortly before the appearance of the second Rounder LP in 1976—*Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard*—Alice announced that she was leaving the act to pursue her own independent musical interests. Hazel was deeply disappointed with Alice's departure, but she already had a separate career and identity. The songs recorded for the Highlander project in 1972 (*Come All You Coal Miners*) led directly to Hazel's involvement with the documentary *Harlan County, USA.* Documentary film producer Barbara Kopple, who had previously heard the songs ultimately included on the album, commissioned Hazel to sing some of her songs for the movie's soundtrack and to write a new piece for the concluding scene. "Mannington Mine Disaster," "Black Lung," and "The Yablonski Murders" (inspired by the 1970 execution-style killings of a maverick UMW leader, Jock Yablonski, and his wife and daughter) appeared on the soundtrack, as did the new song, "They'll Never Keep Us Down." Unlike her other songs, which arose from personal inspiration and emerged after lengthy periods of reflection and germination, "They'll Never Keep Us Down" provided a real challenge because it was written on demand. The song's popularity contributed further to Hazel's self-confidence and her conviction that she was mastering the craft of songwriting. Released in 1976 to critical acclaim, *Harlan County, USA* introduced Hazel to a new audience and prompted a wave of concerts, including a prerelease showing in Harlan, Kentucky, in the hall where the striking miners had met and appearances at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival and at various rallies for miners in other sections of coal country.

Hazel's active schedule introduced her music to a wide variety of audiences, but her varied projects took their toll, emotionally and physically. She had been maintaining her full-time job at Old Mexico Imports since 1969, struggling to balance work time with her musical performances. She had traveled frequently by bus to Pennsylvania for rehearsals with Alice and the Strange Creek Singers, and had gone almost every weekend to Baltimore to see her aging and ill parents. They passed away within a few months of each other, at the end of 1978 and in early 1979. Not surprisingly, given the circumstances, Hazel was hospitalized in 1979 with an undiagnosed stomach problem, a disorder that was probably a result of overwork and stress. When she recovered, she made the decision to quit her job and

live on the income from her music alone. Abandoning earlier intentions to buy a house, she settled down in her small apartment, canceled her credit cards, and resolved to live even more frugally than she had in the past. She vowed to make music on her own terms and conditions and to accept only those jobs that she really wanted to play. Since that time, she has chosen not to employ a regular band but instead has hired musicians when they are needed. Fortunately, there has been no shortage of fine musicians and singers, such as Ron Thomason, Lynn Morris, Barry Mitterhoff; her old friends Mike Seeger, Tracy Schwarz, and Ginny Hawker; and the former members of the Johnson Mountain Boys, who are more than ready to back her up. As an occasional singing partner, Hazel needed someone with strength, range, and passion—in short, someone who could match her own power. She told Ron Thomason that she wanted "a gutsy lead singer to work with. A lot of women don't sing hard enough. It's because of their conditioning."[17] She found her ideal singing partner in Dudley Connell. Connell grew up in Rockbridge, Maryland, and had been a founder and longtime member of the traditional bluegrass band the Johnson Mountain Boys; after 1995, he was part of the progressive bluegrass group Seldom Scene. Connell was a fine guitar player who possessed a tenor voice that attacked notes with a searing intensity.

Hazel's relationship with Rounder Records has been mutually productive and advantageous. She did more than simply record a series of fine LPs for the company; she virtually became the chief adviser to the label, especially concerning bluegrass and old-time music. Acknowledging that he was sometimes naive in his understanding of people's motives and intents, Ken Irwin learned to lean heavily on Hazel for advice concerning potential artists and the type of song material that should be recorded. Hazel, Irwin said, had an "almost uncanny ability to see the truth or lack of it in people." She often sat in on auditions, and sometimes traveled with Irwin to find songs or to hear new musicians (a role that Hazel had in fact played with Mike Seeger when she accompanied him south in 1956 and 1957 on his search for old-time musicians). Hazel has been associated with Rounder throughout most of its history, as it evolved from the obscurity of a counterculture collective to prominence as an independent record label with an international circulation. She was present on the historic day in 1985 when fourteen-year-old Alison Krauss, Rounder's most prominent star, was signed

to the label, and was at the *Grand Ole Opry* in 1993 on the night that Krauss joined that show.

Since 1980, Hazel has enjoyed a distinguished career, one conducted on her own terms: deliberately and moderately paced. Her recordings have been infrequent but have been marked by distinction and uncompromising integrity. Her first solo recording, in 1981, included her trademark mixture of hard country songs and protest material. The album's title, *Hard-Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People* (Rounder 0126), was borrowed from a book of protest songs compiled by Alan Lomax,[18] but could easily describe the contents of Hazel's lifelong repertoire. In the liner notes, Ralph Rinzler described Hazel's music as "art of timeless and enduring values" and declared that "it had been put to work for the benefit of people faced with struggle." *By the Sweat of My Brow* (Rounder 0200) came in 1984, and *It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song* (Rounder 0226) in 1987. In that same year, Rounder released Hazel's first CD, *A Few Old Memories* (Rounder 11529), which contained previously recorded material taken from earlier albums. Although Hazel recorded songs occasionally for thematic anthologies, such as *Coal Mining Women* (Rounder 4025), which also included Florence Reece, Sarah Gunning, and Phyllis Boyens, and *Don't Mourn, Organize! Songs of Labor Songwriter Joe Hill* (Smithsonian Folkways 40026), where she sang "Rebel Girl," she did not return to the studio for a major session until 1996, when she joined with friends Ginny Hawker and Carol Elizabeth Jones to record the critically praised *Heart of a Singer* (Rounder 0443).

These scattered recordings certainly did not connote inactivity. Hazel resisted involvement in the grueling scheme of one-night stands, but nevertheless continued to present her music in a wide range of venues and before a variety of audiences that are among the most diverse enjoyed by any country singer. Movie soundtracks, for example, continued to provide valuable access to new audiences. Independent filmmaker John Sayles had been aware of Hazel's music since he first heard it in *Harlan County, USA,* but he was reintroduced to her singing through the LP *Hard-Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People.* In 1986, he asked Hazel to sing for a movie he had produced and directed, *Matewan,* about the massacre of striking coal miners in West Virginia in 1920. She was heard (but not seen) singing "Fire in the Hole" and "Beautiful Hills of Galilee," a song learned from a Primitive Bap-

tist hymnal and that played as the closing credits rolled. Hazel also made a striking cameo appearance, singing "The Gathering Storm" at an open-casket funeral for a miner. Actors and film crew alike were emotionally moved by the scene. Sayles described the incident to writer Bill Friskics-Warren. As the scene was being set up on a hill overlooking a West Virginia holler, on a day marked by mist and rain, Hazel told Sayles and the assembled cast about the similar funerals of her brother and cousins who had died from black lung. Although "The Gathering Storm" had been written by someone else for the movie, Hazel transformed it into a haunting Baptist hymn. The moment was so poignant and powerful that, for a brief moment, the contrived event seemed like a real funeral.[19]

Although her personal appearances have been limited, they have been well chosen and have taken Hazel to Cuba, Canada, Australia, and Japan (illness prevented a scheduled trip to Russia) as well as to an array of prestigious American venues, such as the Kennedy Center, the Brooklyn Academy for the Performing Arts, the Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, Carnegie Hall, Madison Square Garden, and the Library of Congress. She has continued to perform periodically at folk music festivals and similar settings—such as the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, the Appalachian Festival in Cincinnati, the Brandywine Folk Festival in Delaware, the Calgary Festival in Canada, the Vancouver Folk Music Festival, the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival at Golden Gate Park, and the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago. Hazel also maintains her links with the bluegrass community through her popular workshops and late-night picking parties at the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) conventions each October. The audiences at these affairs include the predictable mix of people who have followed her career since the days of Hazel and Alice or who have learned about her through her music's presence in movie soundtracks or from the publicity surrounding the awards that she has won.

Hazel was greatly surprised, though, and delighted, when she discovered that her following had expanded far beyond those traditional parameters. An invitation to perform in 1998 at Twangfest in Pittsburgh, a gathering of alt.country bands and fans, informed her that a youthful array of rock-nurtured listeners was discovering and turning on to her music. That interest had been anticipated, in fact, as early as 1976 when the country-rock band, New Riders of the Purple Sage, recorded "Don't Put Her Down" on

one of their albums.[20] More recently, other musicians with ties to the country-rock or underground-country scenes, such as Freakwater, Hazeldine, and Exene, have also recorded some of her songs. Allison Wolfe, of the all-women punk band Bratmobile, has not sung Hazel's material, but she identified strongly with her and noted that Hazel's music played frequently in her house during her childhood.[21] It seemed clear that the youthful audience that had made icons of such musical rebels as Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson was also beginning to recognize a similar courage and rock-ribbed honesty in Hazel's music.

Hazel's commitment to social justice has not been dampened by her successes, nor has her conviction that music should be put to the service of working people's welfare. She has continued to sing occasionally at strike benefits and other kinds of labor rallies. For example, she sang in New York on behalf of efforts to unionize the powerful southern textile manufacturer J. P. Stevens, and of course could always be depended on to sing for coal miners in their struggles. One of these campaigns took her to the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill in 1989, where she shared the stage with the radical British folksinger Billy Bragg, singing on behalf of the striking Pittston miners. At still another Pittston rally on a rainy and dreary day, Hazel arrived late and feeling ill, and without a chance to change clothes. After she offered apologies, the reply made by a coal-miner's wife reminded her of why she felt so committed to working people's justice: "Why, honey, you look just like us." The bonds of sympathy and recognition of common origins embodied in the woman's statement do much to explain the comment Hazel once made to a writer: "If I have a religion, that's it: to take what I have, and be able to share it with somebody that needs it. If there's any religion in my life, it's for the working class. And I want to be that way as long as I have a breath."[22]

The tribute made by the miner's wife was probably as much praise as Hazel desired. It was not simply a validation of her lifetime work; it was also a valuable reminder of her enduring link to the culture of her youth. Other formal awards and tributes, however, have come often in the past twenty years. It was appropriate that Hazel would be invited to the White House on Labor Day in 1980, with President Jimmy Carter as host. But this tribute to her career as a champion of working people's rights is only one of several prestigious honors that she has received. Her cherished bluegrass world

has rewarded her achievements in various ways. The Society for the Preservation of Bluegrass Music in America (SPBGMA) named her to its "Hall of Greats" in 1995. The International Bluegrass Music Association has not yet named her to its "Hall of Honor" (the bluegrass equivalent of country music's Hall of Fame), but it gave her a Merit Award in 1993, and she is treated like a matriarch at its annual conventions each October. In 2002, the National Folk Alliance presented to Hazel their Lifetime Achievement Award. In 1998, Shepherd College in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, awarded her an honorary doctorate in the humanities, and in September 2001, she received the nation's highest cultural accolade when the National Endowment for the Arts awarded her a fellowship and a $10,000 prize. Hazel became the subject of a sixty-minute video documentary in 2002 when Mimi Pickering produced her biography for Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky. This celebration of her life and music was appropriately entitled *It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song.*

As rewarding and prestigious as these awards might be, they may not be as satisfying as the events that feature Hazel in both entertainment and educational roles. Increasingly, Hazel has deepened the content of her performances. Whether presented from an auditorium or festival stage, or in a college or university classroom, Hazel's concerts appear as mini-tributes to her life's work and as educational forums that permit her to sing and talk about her mountain origins, her painful adjustment to city life, her compassion for working folk, and the ways in which these experiences have shaped her craft of songwriting. These fusions of concert and tribute had occurred as early as July 1996, when the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife presented "Hazel Dickens: A Life's Work." Fittingly, the symposium was organized by Kate Rinzler, the widow of Ralph Rinzler, who had been so instrumental in the shaping of Hazel's career and who had first presented her in coal-mining symposia several years before. For more than four hours, such musicians as Ginny Hawker, Kay Justice, Tracy Schwarz, Laurie Lewis, Lynn Morris, James King, Kate Brislin and Jody Stecher, the Dry Branch Fire Squad, and Alice Gerrard sang and reminisced about their relationship with and indebtedness to Hazel. The evening ended appropriately when Dudley Connell, and a reconstituted version of the Johnson Mountain Boys, joined Hazel in a stirring concert of some of her most memorable songs.

One of the most instructive of Hazel's concert/tributes came on October

8, 2003, when she appeared at San Francisco State University as the centerpiece of a program sponsored by the university's Labor Archives and Research Center, "An Evening with Hazel Dickens." The event consisted of a concert that featured examples of all the kinds of song material performed during her career, including everything from "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky-Tonk Angels" to "Don't Put Her Down" and "Mannington Mine Disaster," and participation in an ongoing dialogue with noted labor folklorist Archie Green about "the deeper meanings of labor songs and worker culture." The shy little mountain girl who had left school in the seventh grade, once described herself as totally "unsocialized," and complained about not knowing how to talk to people had emerged as a mature and articulate spokesperson for working folk.

It is presumptuous, and decidedly premature, to talk about Hazel's legacy, because her career has not yet run its course. She is still actively presenting her music to audiences throughout the nation and, at the time of this writing, is busy at work recording another CD for Rounder. Her legacy, though, will extend far beyond the occasional memorials and awards and will be measured in different ways by different people. Everyone, of course, will remember her voice and the passion that animates it, and critics will struggle to come up with words that adequately capture the eloquence that her voice conveys. Journalist Ed Bumgardner, for example, said that Hazel's voice was "as strong and chilling as a mountain wind howling across a miner's grave" and that it conveyed "the harshness of her heritage and compassion for those who have endured it."[23] Bill Friskics-Warren similarly noted the power that lay in her "rough-hewn wail," but remarked further that "at its most lovelorn, Dickens' voice is also perhaps the purest embodiment of Hank Williams' lonesome whippoorwill."[24]

Although people will always treasure Hazel's uncompromising voice, they will also value the contributions that she has made to bluegrass and old-time country music, women's rights, and working-class justice. But the issues that she has embraced, and the values she holds dear, are most effectively encapsulated and immortalized in the songs that she has bequeathed to us. They are celebrated in this book. Hazel has written often about many of the predictable themes of bluegrass—mama, the old home place, the distant but cherished past, the desire for independence, and love in its tragic dimensions—but she has also reached far beyond those topics

to address questions of estrangement, survival, human dignity, and social and economic justice that concern us all. This universality and awareness of the issues of her own time is what her longtime singing partner, Dudley Connell, had in mind when he said that Hazel had "raised the bar" in the writing of bluegrass song lyrics.[25]

The forty songs anthologized here, of course, are only a small portion of her total output, and many others will usher forth from her creative spirit before her life's work is done. But augmented by her explanations of why each song was written, the songs chosen for this book provide us with the essential ingredients to appreciate this remarkable woman and her role in documenting and commemorating the lives of ordinary people in modern America. Several years ago, another sensitive musical poet of working-class America, Steve Earle, lamented the decline of radical activism in the United States and called for the revival of a caring and compassionate society: "Come back, Woody Guthrie."[26] One can empathize with the despair conveyed by Earle's lyrics, and yet take heart from the knowledge that, in the sanctuary of her apartment in Washington, D.C., a mountain woman named Hazel Dickens is still writing songs that challenge the easy complacency and corporate arrogance of our time.

## NOTES

1. This term was used as the title of the CD reissue of their first two recordings: *Pioneering Women of Bluegrass* (Smithsonian Folkways SFCD 40065).

2. Menius was the executive director of the International Bluegrass Music Association (IBMA) from 1985 to 1990, and was associate festival coordinator for MerleFest, an acoustic music festival held each year in Wilkesboro, North Carolina. The most important chronicler of women in bluegrass music, though, is Murphy Henry, a five-string banjoist and teacher who edits a quarterly newsletter in Virginia, *Women in Bluegrass* (522 Shawnee Trail, Winchester, VA 22602).

3. Written by Jeff White, John Pennell, and Billy Smith, the song was most effectively interpreted by Dan Tyminski in a CD of the same name, *Carry Me across the Mountain* (Doobie Shea Records 2002).

4. Bill Friskics-Warren, "Coal Miner's Sister," *No Depression* 20 (March–April 1999): 78.

5. Pete Kuykendall was the founder and publisher of *Bluegrass Unlimited*, the

premier bluegrass music journal. Spottswood is best known as an authority on American ethnic styles of music. I am now writing a full-scale biography of Mike Seeger. The best overview of his musical career is Jon Weisberger, "Mike Seeger: True Stories," *No Depression* 47 (September–October 2003): 96–109.

6. Mike Seeger also began his habit of taping musical performances at these affairs. His enormous collection of such material is housed in the Southern Folklife Collection, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, Mike Seeger Collection, Inventory #20009.

7. Alan Lomax, "Bluegrass Background: Folk Music with Overdrive," *Esquire* 52, no. 4 (October 1959): 103–9.

8. Geoffrey Himes, "From the Hills," *Baltimore City Paper On Line* 24, no. 2 (January 12–19, 2000).

9. For an overview of Gerrard's life and career, see Jack Bernhardt, "With a Song in Her Heart: The Musical Journey of Alice Gerrard," *The Old-Time Herald* 9, no. 8 (Summer 2005): 24–30.

10. Originally issued in three boxed collections of eighty-four songs: Folkways FP 251, 252, 253. Now available on Smithsonian Folkways.

11. *Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard* (Rounder 0054).

12. Ron Thomason, "An Open Letter to Hazel and Alice," *Muleskinner News* (September 1974): 5.

13. *Strange Creek Singers* (Arhoolie 9003).

14. Bruce Shapiro, *Oh, What a Time! The Southern Grassroots Music Tour* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Folk Cultural Revival Project, 1982), 8.

15. Hazel's transformation as a "political" songwriter is discussed by Mary Battiata in a fine article called "A High and Lonesome Sound," *Washington Post Magazine,* June 24, 2001, 8–15, 21–24.

16. Naomi Judd, with Bud Schaetzle, *Love Can Build a Bridge* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1993), 124.

17. Ron Thomason, "Hazel Dickens, Only a Woman," *Bluegrass Unlimited* (February 1982): 23–26.

18. Alan Lomax, *Hard-Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People* (New York: Oak Publications, 1967); the book includes a foreword by Woody Guthrie and items that had originally been collected in the 1930s.

19. Friskics-Warren, "Coal Miner's Sister," 83.

20. *New Riders* (MCA 2196).

21. Michael Hudson, "Hazel Dickens Inspires New Generation of Musicians," *Southern Exposure* 31 (Spring 2004): 46–47; Hudson's article first appeared in *Womensenews,* December 12, 2003, www.highbeam.com/doc.

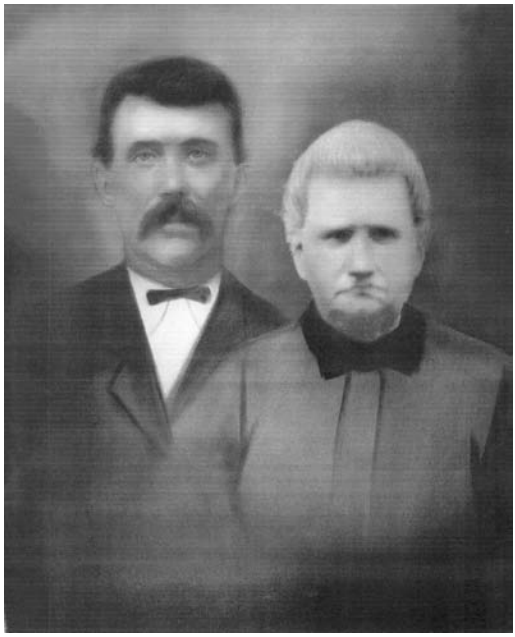
22. Quoted in Caroline Wright, "Hazel Dickens: A Bridge between Two Worlds," *Bluegrass Now* 11, no. 12 (December 2001): 19.

23. Ed Bumgardner, *Winston-Salem Journal,* November 3, 1989, 47.

24. Friskics-Warren, "Coal Miner's Sister," 74.

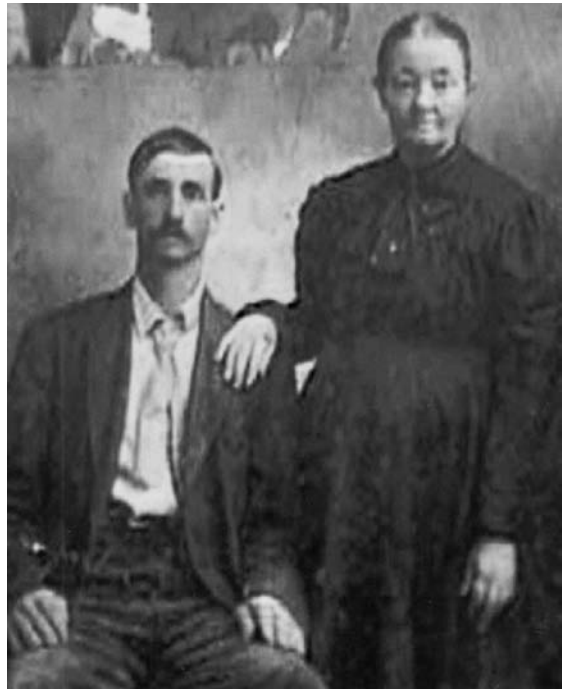
25. Steve Romanoski, "Interview with Dudley Connell," *iBluegrass.com,* September 24, 2001, 12, www.rootsnetwork.com.bg.

26. The line is heard in a song written and recorded by Earle in 1997: "Christmas in Washington," *El Corazon* (Warner Brothers 946789–2).



Hazel's paternal grandparents, John Henrey Dickens and Sarah A. Gallimore Dickens. Courtesy of Hazel Dickens. Unless indicated otherwise, all illustrations are from Hazel Dickens' collection.

Hazel's maternal grandparents, Garland Simpkins and Eliza Jane Simpkins, from Indian Valley, Floyd County, Virginia.



Wedding picture of Hazel's parents, Hillary Nathan ("H. N.") Dickens and Sarah Aldora Simpkins Dickens.

Hazel's sisters Dovie Dickens Bailey (*left*) and Beulah Dickens Roberts in the 1940s in West Virginia. Both are now deceased.

Hazel on a visit back home in West Virginia, early 1950s.

Hazel's family in the early 1950s. *Front row, left to right:* Hattie Dickens (Hazel's niece), Kathleen Bailey (niece), Roger Bailey (nephew), Arnold Dickens (brother), Bobby Woolwine (nephew). *Middle row:* Hazel Dickens, Dovie Bailey (sister), Sally Dickens (sister), Tootsie Dickens (sister-in-law), Sarah Dickens (mother). *Back row:* John Dickens, with guitar (brother), Guy Dickens, with mandolin (brother).

Hazel back home in West Virginia on a visit, nineteen or twenty years old.

A studio portrait taken in Baltimore in the early 1950s, before Hazel became a professional musician.

The Pike County Boys and Hazel, 1956, Baltimore. *Front row, left to right:* Dickie Rittler (banjo), Bobby Baker (guitar and lead vocals). *Back row:* Mike Seeger (fiddle), Hazel Dickens (bass, harmony vocals, and some lead vocals), Bob Shanklin (mandolin and vocals).

Hazel Dickens and Ralph Stanley, New River Ranch, Rising Sun, Maryland, 1965.

Bill Monroe and Hazel singing at Tom Gray's home in Kensington, Maryland, November 1965. *Left to right:* Bill Monroe, Russ Hooper, Hazel Dickens. Dave Williams is behind Monroe, and Peter Rowan is playing guitar, toward the camera but out of sight. Photograph by Tom Gray. Used by permission

Alice Gerrard and Hazel Dickens, 1966 or 1967. Photograph by John Cohen. Used by permission.

Workshop at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Washington, D.C., 1969. Hazel is singing her song "Black Lung" for the first time in public. *Left to right:* Maybelle Carter, Dock Boggs, Hazel Dickens, Merle Travis, Archie Green. Courtesy of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage.

CD cover for *Strange Creek Singers,* Arhoolie 9003, 1972. *Left to right:* Tracy Schwarz, Alice Gerrard, Mike Seeger, Hazel Dickens. Lamar Grier, who played banjo on this CD, is not shown here. Courtesy of Arhoolie Records, *www.arhoolie.com.*

Hazel Dickens (*left*) and Patsy Montana at a festival workshop in the 1970s. Photograph by Rosamond Norbury. Used by permission.

Hazel singing on the picket line to striking miners in Stearns, Kentucky, in the 1970s. Photograph by Karen Kasmauski. Used by permission.

Hazel singing on the picket line in Stearns, Kentucky, in the 1970s. Photograph by Karen Kasmauski. Used by permission.

At the Brandywine Folk Festival in Delaware, July 1974. *Left to right:* Alice Gerrard, Old Belle Reed, Hazel Dickens. Photograph by Carl Fleischhauer. Used by permission.

The Strange Creek Singers at the Brandywine Folk Festival in Delaware, 1974. *Left to right:* Lamar Grier, Tracy Schwarz, Mike Seeger, Hazel Dickens, Alice Gerrard. Photograph by Carl Fleischhauer. Used by permission.

Hazel's family in the late 1970s. *Front row, left to right:* Velvie Woolwine (sister), Dovie Bailey (sister), Hazel Dickens, Beulah Cardwell Roberts (sister). *Back row:* Robert and Arnold Dickens (brothers).

# Songs and Memories

*Hazel Dickens*

## Mama's Hand

People took to this song like no other that I've ever sung. Of course in bluegrass you hear a lot of songs about mother. I've gotten more responses, more nice sentiments about this song than any other song. Lynn Morris, whose version won the IBMA's Song of the Year award in 1996, says the same thing. For some reason, almost every time I sing it, I can see people in the audience with tears in their eyes.

There was a very special bond between me and my mother. When I was three months old, I developed this condition where I didn't want to eat. I didn't want to take my milk anymore. I think that it's a common thing with babies. They have to give them something else to supplement their intake rather than milk. I was just literally wasting away. My mama would not have that. She wouldn't sit there and see one of her children die.

We lived back on a mountain where I was born. My father was out working somewhere, cutting timber and hauling it to the mines. Our family doctor had said he had done all he could do, that he didn't know how to treat me. Mama said she was going to take me to a baby doctor in the next town who knew how to deal with my condition. That was very unlike her. She

never went anywhere without my father. Oh, she might walk across the hill to a neighbor's house, but that's about as far as she would go. But she walked off that mountain in that heat, with everybody telling her I wouldn't last until she got me on the train. But she did it! She got on the train, went to the next town, and looked up that doctor. He said the only thing he could think of was to feed me crackers. How she got them down me, I don't know. She probably soaked them in water or milk. That's how she pulled me through.

I think it was probably a source of pride for her. I never thought about it until years later, but she brought me back home and pulled me through. From that time on it seemed like she kinda paid special attention to me. I remember sometimes when we had only one glass of milk, she would walk the length and breadth of this long table, right by my brothers and sisters, and sit the glass by my plate. I always felt real special when she did that. She always paid close attention when I got sick (and I got sick a lot). It seemed like the bond was there. We were going to stick up for each other the rest of our lives. If she got into an argument with my father, I always took her side. He was a very dominant man, and she was very shy. After I got grown I thought back on those days and tried to deal with some of those feelings and why there was such a strong bond between the two of us. I believe it might have been that incident. She could think this about herself: I have this to be proud of, that I pulled my kid through.

## *Mama's Hand*

I said goodbye to that plain little mining town
With just a few old clothes that had made the rounds
I knew I was leaving a lot of things that were good
But I thought I'd make a break while I still could
As I look back to wave once more
To Mama crying in the door
For me and for what the world might have in store
For she knew I'd never be her little girl no more
She was drifting back to another time
When she was young and hoped to find

A better life than what her Mama's had been
And it was hard to let go of Mama's hand, my Mama's hand

*Chorus:*
One old paper bag filled with hand me downs
A plain old country girl raised on gospel sounds
With only the love she gave me, pride in what I am
And it was hard to let go of Mama's hand, my Mama's hand

I thought of all the love she gave, thought of all the years she slaved
To try and make this run down shack a home
A dream that really died before it was born
But she pulled us through the hardest times
And made us hold our head up high
A gift we carry with us all our lives
For we were oh so special in Mama's eyes
As I looked back down that dusty road
To Mama and her heavy load
I knew what I was leaving I would never find again
And it was hard to let go of Mama's hand, my Mama's hand

*Repeat Chorus*

## A Few Old Memories

Oft times while rummaging through a closet where I keep most of my pictures, I run into long-forgotten old photographs of family, friends, and lovers. Many of them can take me back in time and bring back a lot of happy memories shared with friends and loved ones—back to places I'm glad I've been, while others can take me down roads I do not want to walk again—into seldom entered rooms and hidden recesses of the past, events I thought I'd buried long ago. I obviously ran into a few of those old ghosts back in 1982 when I entered the wrong memory one day. And before I could free myself and get out of there, I lingered *a bit too long* and lost myself in a few old memories.

### *A Few Old Memories*

Just a few old memories, that slipped in through the door
Though I thought I had closed it, so tightly before
I can't understand it, why it should bother my mind
For it all belongs to another place and time

*Chorus:*
Just a few old keepsakes way back on the shelf
No they don't mean nothing, I'm surprised that they're left
Just a few old love letters, with the edges all brown
And an old faded picture, I keep turned upside down

Just a few old memories, that go way back in time
Why I can hardly remember, I don't know why I'm crying
No I can't understand it, why I'm surprised at my self
First thing tomorrow morning, I'm gonna clean off that shelf

*Repeat Chorus*

## You'll Get No More of Me

I got this idea for a song sometime in 1982 from a poem written by Michael Drayton, called "Love's Farewell." It reads, "Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part. Nay, I have done, you get no more of me." The last line jumped out at me, and I used that line to work from. I had no inkling of how to begin. I just put down whatever popped into my head, and figured I'd edit later. By the second verse the creative juices had started to flow, and when I wrote, "You have wrecked my heart, like a cruel winter storm bending my branches low," I knew I was on to something. For it was the kind of poetry I'd been hoping for, and I knew instinctively that I was experiencing a new birth, and that I would call it "You'll Get No More of Me."

### *You'll Get No More of Me*

As you go from me you want all that's left
The last shred of pride in my heart
'Till you've wrung the last teardrop from my eyes
You won't be satisfied

*Chorus:*
So take your cold, unloving heart
Your eyes too blinded to see
Oh you never found the door to this heart of mine
You'll get no more of me

You have wrecked my heart like a cruel winter storm
Bending my branches low
Oh your wayward heart and tortured soul
Leave no memories worthy to hold

So I'll take back my heart from the willow bough
I'll hang my tears out to dry
I'll hang my head in sorrow no more
And no more tears will I cry

*Repeat Chorus*

## West Virginia My Home

The idea for the song may have originated in Baltimore, but it was actually written after I was living in Washington. Some of the ideas and thoughts I had there came from my feeling all this difference between the people that I met there and the people I had known back home. I just didn't seem to feel that camaraderie that I had with people back home. It seemed like the neighbors and everybody knew each other back there. You could live right next door to people in the city, and they didn't know you. You could live there and die, and nobody would know you'd passed on. There was quite a bit of lone-

liness for a lot of people who had moved to the city, this feeling of isolation and not communing with people. In the early years I would take the train back home on visits. During my return trip at some point I would start to feel that uneasiness and disconnect the closer I got to the city. I would often wonder why I was going back. I seemed to feel I was on automatic pilot. Ultimately, I knew why—I had to support myself, and I could not do that back home. I also knew I needed and wanted the freedom to try my wings and be on my own for the first time in my life. One of the big disconnects in the city was the fact that a lot of city people didn't like hillbillies. And to tell the truth, there was not a lot of love lost on that one from us either!

I remember one lady who lived next door to us in one of those endless rows of row houses said she wished I'd go back to where I came from. It seemed I woke the dear soul up every morning around 6 A.M. by singing at the top of my lungs while I was in the shower! Also one day as I was looking for an apartment in a working-class neighborhood, I saw a "for rent" sign and went to check it out for more information and got more than I bargained for. Under the For Rent portion was a sign printed in large bold letters, "No dogs or Hillbillies." I knew I fit one of those descriptions. I also figured she was related to the lady that didn't fully appreciate my free early-morning concerts, so I hit the road and didn't look back until I was out of the entire neighborhood!

I believe the turning point in my adjustment to my new environment, and the experience that opened doors for me that had been previously closed between me and city folks, came when I began to meet new friends who were as passionate about the music as I was, and who also appreciated what I was doing in the music. It was a wonderful common ground on which to build and nurture new friendships. We were a lot more willing to keep the cultural differences in the background and deal with one another more on a musical level until we learned to begin trusting the fact that we could be good friends despite the differences in our upbringings. Many of those same friends are still some of my best friends all these many years later.

This song is one of my best songs, wherever I sing it, and it touches hearts in the way it was meant to—to honor my native home and to remind other people of theirs. It was written in the late '60s and early '70s. I recorded it twice, once in 1973 and again in 1980. I prefer the later recording, for I believe after living with the song for a while, I was freer to communicate and convey

some of the emotions I was feeling when I wrote the song. Even after all these years, when people ask where are you from, I always say West Virginia.

## *West Virginia My Home*

West Virginia, oh my home
West Virginia's where I belong
In the dead of the night in the still and the quiet
I slip away like a bird in flight
Back to those hills the place that I call home

It's been years now since I left there
And this city life's about got the best of me
I can't remember why I left so free
What I wanted to do, what I wanted to see
But I can sure remember where I come from

Well I've paid the price for leaving
And this life I have is not one I thought I'd find
Let me live love let me cry
And when I go just let me die
Among the friends who'll remember when I'm gone

West Virginia, oh my home
West Virginia's where I belong
In the dead of the night in the still and the quiet
I slip away like a bird in flight
Back to those hills the place that I call home

Home, home, home
Oh I can see it so clear in my mind
Home, home, home
I can almost smell the honeysuckle vine
In the dead of the night in the still and the quiet
I slip away like a bird in flight
Back to those hills the place that I call home

*Tag:*
Home

# My Better Years

This is a true song in many ways. I wrote it in 1970 after my divorce. My former husband, Joe Cohen, came back one day after I had moved to Washington. He said that he had made a mistake, and that he wanted us to get back together. I still cared for him in some ways, but I could not forgive him for his original decision that we should have a trial separation. I felt like he had all the control over that decision and I had none. I also knew when I walked out that door I'd never return. So I very much needed a different solution.

From time to time one of our old friends would try to get me to talk to him and would try to get us back together. But I stood my ground, and I would say he made his decision. I'm in control of my life now. I felt like I couldn't trust that much again. I wanted to move on. Also, I was getting more and more into music and playing out more. I decided that's what made me the happiest, and it had always been there for me—my beacon in the storm, my comfort zone.

So as we sat there talking, he could see the change in me. I was a much stronger person than I was when we separated. I was in control and I could see that he felt it. We talked about music some and I said that I'd written a new song. He wanted to know the name of it and what it was about. I said it's "Don't Put Her Down, You Helped Put Her There" and proceeded to tell him about it. I mentioned that certain types of men like to put women down, and they like to control them. He reacted strongly to that remark and said he did not agree. He felt that women were more in control than men. He didn't seem to like my song very much. He asked about my relationships with men, and I bragged that I was dating again, that I was playing the field. He said he wished he could do that, that he had not had much luck in his relationships. I didn't let it show, but I did feel a little sorry for him, for us, for I knew it was over. Shortly after that visit I wrote "My Better Years." He came to one of my concerts right after I wrote it and came back to say hello. He said, "By the way, when did you write that song "My Better Years?" I said, "Oh, some time ago." I didn't tell that it was about us, but I believe he knew.

## *My Better Years*

*Chorus:*
Well you're back on my door steps a-crying
Like I cried through all those lonely years
But I can't dry your tears
It's been too long since love was here
And I've already gave you, my better years
And so the pages of life kept right on turning
They never stopped for us to harvest the years
And old embers of love keep right on dying
For there was no one to dry my tears

*Repeat Chorus*
But I'll try not to blame you
I'll try not to shame you
All I can do now is wish you well
And if you should need a friend
I'll be there 'till the end
But don't ask me to love you again

And don't come back on my doorstep a-crying
Hoping for what's been dead so long
For the embers have long turned to ashes
There's nothing here but old memories and this song

*Tag:*
No don't come back on my doorstop a-crying
My friend there's nothing but old memories
And this song

# Working Girl Blues

I was actually at work when I started to write this song. I was working at a retail store in Washington in 1975 and feeling hassled about how to do my work, ride the Greyhound bus over to my parents some weekends so I could see after them, and then ride back so I could go to my job playing music, get in late, get a few hours of sleep and have to get up and do my day job the next day. I had to work, work, work, even on my day off. I just got real frustrated this particular day, and wanted to be out of there. I wanted to be where the music was. I was taking inventory, so I just turned the sheet over and started writing "Working Girl Blues." The women who worked with me really liked it. If they came to one of my shows, they would request it. It's gotten me a lot of mileage.

## *Working Girl Blues*

I've got the early Monday morning working blues
I put on my ragged wore out working shoes
The weekend was too short but I can't choose
When the Lord made the working girl, He made the blues

*Chorus:*
Well I'm tired of working my life away
Giving somebody else all of my pay
While they get rich on the profits that I lose
Leaving me here with the working girl blues

*Yodel:* I le yodel lay dee working girl blues

I can't even afford a new pair of shoes
While they can live in any old penthouse they choose
And all that I've got is the working girl blues

My boss said a raise is due most any day
But I wonder will my hair be all turned gray

Before he turns that dollar loose and I get my dues
And lose a little bit of these working girl blues

Well I know there's a lot of working girls like me
Who are overworked and underpaid you see
And we all know our pocket's been picked clean
So the rich can have that all American dream!

And we're tired of working our lives away
Giving somebody else all of our pay
While they get rich on the profits that we lose
Leaving us here with the working girl blues

*Yodel*

## Scars from an Old Love

I wrote this song in 1975 and 1976 after I finished "My Better Years," which was about the breakup of my marriage. It clearly shows how I was still affected by that breakup. Even though I'd been dating for a while, I was not allowing myself to get too seriously involved. I was not ready to trust that much again. But fate generally has a lot to do in matters of the heart. I had recently met someone of interest and we became fast friends, and I knew that this new relationship had the potential of becoming the first really serious relationship since my marriage. I was more open to this relationship than the previous ones from two or three years back, but the trust issue was still in the back of my mind, and to relieve my anxieties I began writing songs about it. I started writing this one on a Greyhound bus on my way to Pennsylvania for a rehearsal, around 1975 or 1976.

### *Scars from an Old Love*

I've held him as close as I dare to go
All his sweet has started to show

I know that I need him, but trusting is rough
For the scars from an old love haven't quite healed enough

*Chorus:*
Yes the battle is over but healing takes time
Leaving old lovers, old memories behind
I know that I love him, need him so much
But the scars from an old love haven't quite healed enough

The battle is over and the victor has fled
Wounded and dying one lonely heart bled
Now love sounds her bugle playing love's old sweet song
While the scars from an old love haven't quite all gone

*Repeat Chorus*

## Lost Patterns

This is one of my favorite songs that I've written, and possibly some of my best writing. Written in the late 1970s, it talks about working people and the hardships they go through while trying to cope with the pressures of life and trying to keep a marriage and home together.

### *Lost Patterns*

The worn out linoleum has lost its pattern on the kitchen floor
And the woman that used to scrub it
Turned around and walked right out the door
The oil cloth on the table she'd wiped so many times it's almost gone
And the elbows leaning on it held the head of a man that drank alone

Every now and then his empty can would shatter the silence of the room
As it landed on her pretty face
Still smiling from the broken picture frame

For lately since she left him, he just sits at the kitchen table drinkin' beer
Staring at that worn linoleum
Trying to trace the lost patterns around his chair

*Chorus:*
Well it's hard luck hard times
And too many rainy days
Hard working people
Who just get by from pay to pay
Well it takes its toll upon us
We sometimes drive away the ones who care
From all the wearing and the tearing
The caring just walks right out the door

## Scraps from Your Table

This is one of those little nasty smart-alecky songs that I like to write. I was in this affair in 1979 and felt I was getting shortchanged. I felt like I wasn't getting my fair share of attention because I thought he was still hung up on the past. So I decided to study the whole thing over and not rush to judgment. And if I could hang in there, it looked like this could get messy enough that I could get a few good songs out of it. So I proceeded with my study and here's where good judgment and unbiased opinions led me. Sometimes and probably all too often when people (generally men) want to end an affair, they are too insecure to just end it, wipe the slate clean, and begin anew. Oh no, that's not messy enough. Instead, they start another affair while they are still emotionally hung up on the first one. So they bring all that baggage and dump it in *your* lap and you spend the bulk of your time cleaning up and tripping over garbage that should have been cleaned up before they even started making eyes at you. And so we end up with all the leftovers, and that's how I got the material for "Scraps from Your Table."

### *Scraps from Your Table*

Scraps from your table are getting hard to take
Cold leftovers for which I wait
Crumb by crumb you give me some of what she throws away
Scraps from your table leave me hungrier each day

*Chorus:*
It's time to clean up the party's over now
After party favors leftover wine
I'm getting tired picking up the mess she makes of you
Scraps from your table I'm sending back with you

Cold, cold love warmed over too
Ain't good for nothing when she's done with you
I'm tired of getting handouts, standing in your line
For yesterday's bad news and leftover wine

Scraps from your table when I get my turn
Aren't sparks enough to light my fire
Much less make it burn
I'm starved out for lovin' what you never gave
Your see through lies are well disguised, but the menu's just the same

*Repeat Chorus*

## Beyond the River Bend

This was the first song I tried to write in the Carter Family style. The Carters were great favorites in our home as I grew up. When we sang together around the house, we sang such songs as "Crying Holy," "The Lover's Return," "Midnight on the Stormy Deep," "Wildwood Flower," and "Can the Circle Be Unbroken." I still sing "Keep On the Sunny Side" as an encore or sing-along, and have done so down through the years.

*Beyond the River Bend*

There's a path that leads back through my memory
And how often I've walked it these days
Where I find sweet peace among the flowers
On a grassy bank beyond the river bend

*Chorus:*
But it's only a memory, yes it's only a memory my friend
Yes it's only a memory I can never go back home again
Down by the river, down by the old river bend
Down by the river, a sweet fragrance of flowers winds

Oh it seems life's troubles and trials
Get harder and harder to mend
Oh how sweet it would be to sit down
On the grassy bank beyond the river bend

*Repeat Chorus*

## Won't You Come and Sing for Me?

"Won't You Come and Sing for Me" was the first commercial recording of one of my songs that contained lyrics, music, and ideas that were entirely mine. I had previously recorded one of my songs on my first album, *Cowboy Jim,* but the idea came from my father. Although I wrote "Won't You Come and Sing for Me" in the early sixties, it sat on a Folkways Record shelf for eight years and wasn't released until 1973. Folkways had no plans to release the album at all until Rounder greased the wheels of competition by offering to buy it for potential release on that label.

Now this is the way the song came about. I'm really not religious, to tell the truth. However, when I was growing up, I was impressed by the love and

kindness that was openly shared and displayed among the brothers and sisters of the old Primitive Baptist church. It was that and the singing of the old songs that stayed in my memories down through the years (not the preaching). Particularly at the end of the service after they sang the parting song, they go around and shake hands and greet each other, humbling themselves before each other with smiles and hugs and invitations to go home with them and share a meal. This kind of humility and harmonious spirit of a common people inspired me to write this song as a tribute to that place and time tucked away in the corner of my memory.

## *Won't You Come and Sing for Me?*

I feel the shadows now upon me
And fair angels beyond me
Before I go dear Christian brothers
Won't you come and sing for me

*Chorus:*
Sing the hymns we sang together
That plain little church with the benches all worn
How dear to my heart how precious the moments
We stood shaking hands and singing the songs

My burdens heavy my way has grown weary
And I have traveled a road that was long
It would warm this old heart my brothers
If you'd come and sing one song

In my home beyond that dark river
Your dear faces no more I'll see
Until we meet where there's no more sad partings
Won't you come and sing for me

*Repeat Chorus*

# Only the Lonely

When I wrote this song, I was experiencing a lot of loneliness. Many things were happening in my life on many fronts and I was not getting what I needed from those around me. I felt no one in the world could be as lonely as me. I felt an affinity with Lefty, Hank, George, and Kitty and others who wrote and sang such great lonesome songs. I felt too that I knew that lonely place inside of them that caused them to write such songs. I felt I'd been there. So when I began writing "Only the Lonely," I had no idea in mind. It just started from a lonesome feeling and I began singing that feeling. "Only the lonely, lonely, lonely, only the lonely will know." Although the song was very personal, I thought it might bring some comfort to those who experience feelings of loneliness in their lives from time to time, to know there are others out there who understand and share those feelings.

## *Only the Lonely*

*Chorus:*
Only the lonely, lonely, lonely
Only the lonely will know

I've spent a lifetime searching for some kind
Of contentment here in my soul
Just a little sunshine, only sometimes
And a place to come in from the cold

*Sing Chorus*

Lost and lonely longing for only
One ray of hope in this dark well of time
Hearts that's forsaken left silently breaking
Shipwrecked and lost on life's stormy sea

*Repeat Chorus*

# Rambling Woman

This song from the early '70s usually gets a few knowing grins from both the male and female audience. It's sort of a rebuttal against all those songs about "rambling men." "Don't fall in love with me, darling, I'm a rambler." "I'm gonna leave her crying in the smoke along the track." Part of me identified with the rambling impulse, and another part would like to have had a home-loving man, except when I want to hit the road.

## *Rambling Woman*

You've been handing me a lot of sweet talk
About things you want us to do
You talking about settling down
In a dream house built for two
Well I hate to disappoint you
But I don't fit into that plan
For I'm a ramblin' woman and you're a home-loving man

*Chorus:*
Yes I'm a ramblin' woman
And I hope you understand
For you know a ramblin' woman
Is no good for a home-lovin' man

So take all of that sweet talk
And give it to some other girl
Who'd be happy to rock your babies
And live in your kind of world
For I'm a different kind of woman
Got a different set of plans
And you know a ramblin' woman
Is no good for a home-lovin' man

*Repeat Chorus*

# Your Greedy Heart

Here's another one of those "relationship" songs that I wrote in 1980. It's about people that aren't suited for one another. You often see people in relationships where one person does most of the giving, and the other one does all the taking. There's no one to blame; they chose each other.

## *Your Greedy Heart*

I have waited long in silence, while you realized your dreams
But you take and take and take love, never turn a hand for me
Like a teardrop in an ocean, grain of sand upon a beach
I could journey on forever to a heart that's out of reach

*Chorus:*
Oh what more can I give you than I've not already give
I have only one heart, one life to live
You take while I go wanting unmindful of your greed
One lifetime is too short to give you all that you need

The walls of love have tumbled 'round me, left me standing by myself
As I search among the ruins for a trace that might be left
And if all the love I've given was just wasted on your greed
I can't stand another moment trying to satisfy your need

The flame of love so warm and tender, could never melt your selfish heart
The Gods of love could all surrender, but from tears you'd never part
When a flower blooms for loving oh it needs such tender care
I have grown so tired of reaching, for a love that's never there

*Repeat Chorus*

# Don't Put Her Down, You Helped Put Her There

This song was written in the early '70s when times and attitudes were very different from what they are today. Now women front their own bands and make their own decisions; they compete in the marketplace alongside the men. Does that mean we've had a complete turnaround in men's attitudes toward women? I'm afraid not, but there have been some nice changes. Some of the younger male musicians who have come along in the past few years did not all grow up under the Good Old Boy regime. So they tend to be more open and sensitive in their working relationships with women. There are bonds of friendship and trust that never existed before with those from "the old school of thought." And I should know, being one of the first women in bluegrass, that kind of mind-set was predominant. There were few choices open to women in those days and working conditions left a lot to be desired, when and if you did work. If I was working, I was generally the only female in the band. So I got hit on all the time, and they got mad when I turned them down. That made working conditions even more tense. One guy started hitting on me right on the bandstand in the middle of a song, with his wife sitting in front of the stage! On another occasion I'd just been hired to play bass behind this band who had all worked with well-known people and they considered themselves professionals. My first night on the job every single member of the band made a trip over to my table when I was on a break to hit on me. They all accepted "No" and went on, except one. He kept trying night after night. He finally got so angry I thought he might strike me. And he yelled at me, what is wrong with you? It never once entered his "good old boy" brain that the problem was *him* and not me. I only mention these incidents (which only scratch the surface) to give some insight into the mind-set of those people and what the early days were like for women who loved the music.

When they weren't flirting with me, they would talk about the women they ran around with like they were dogs. They were mostly country boys

who had moved to the city to find work, but they still had the same old attitudes they had grown up with. Women, to them, tended to be either wives or whores. One of my sisters had the bad luck of falling for the sweet talk of a guy like that who married her, kept her pregnant, and treated her like dirt. I wrote this song for my sister and the many women like her up and down the road of life who deserved a whole lot better than what they got!

## *Don't Put Her Down, You Helped Put Her There*

You pull the string she's your plaything
You can make her or break her it's true
You abuse her, accuse her, turn around and use her
Then forsake her anytime it suits you

*Chorus:*
Well there's more to her than powder and paint
Than her peroxided bleached-out hair
If she acts that way it's 'cause you've had your day
Don't put her down, you helped put here there

She hangs around playing the clown
While her soul is aching inside
She's heartbreaks child—she just lives for your smile
To build her up in a world made by men

At the house down the way, you sneak in—you pay
For her love her body all her shame
Then you call yourself a man, you say you just don't understand
How a woman could turn out that way

*Repeat Chorus*

# It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song

When I wrote this song, in 1986, I was probably writing my autobiography and didn't know it. I *thought* I was just writing about this person who experiences a lot in life, but loses some of herself along the way. A little piece of her is left behind in every relationship, job, or experience that she encountered, and can't be retrieved. I imagine the reason that we all leave bits and pieces of ourselves scattered down the road of life is that we live and learn by experiences. So if we grow (and some of us do), we won't be the same person when we leave a relationship or experience. Some of our old self is left behind. Sometimes it's hard to tell how much we take away and how much we leave behind. I always hope I leave more good than bad.

## *It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song*

She's lost a lot of herself that time cannot replace
Bits and pieces of herself gone, without a trace
She's been a-holding on to anything that happened to be there
All used up and forgotten and scattered everywhere

*Chorus:*
Oh she is not an angel, so don't look for her wings
She's a hurtin' woman who lives the songs she sings
She learned them all the hard way on the streets of life alone
That is why it's hard to tell the singer from the song

One by one her young years were gone before she knew
Wasted on some loser who was only walking through
Each time her bruised and lonely heart tried to break the fall
And gather up the pieces of a life that paid it all!

*Repeat Chorus*

# I Love to Sing the Old Songs

I wrote this song in 2001 after reading an article written in a Primitive Baptist newsletter—they call them "minutes." My father gave it to me back in the 1960s. I read the piece he had written, as he asked me to do, but didn't read the one that inspired this song until years later. It was written by an elderly lady named Julia Hollis who lived in Oklahoma. She said she had been singing since she was three years old. She dearly loved singing and listening to the other members of her church sing, and the old songs had been a blessing and comfort to her down through the years. What the minister got out of prayer, she seemed to get out of the singing and the old songs. She said that she would never forget the old singers and their songs. The more I read, the more I realized how much we had in common when it came to our love and passion for the old songs, even though we were years and miles apart in age and distance. We were kindred spirits. When I finished reading her article, I wrote a note to myself that included a few of her words to remind me to write a song about how the old songs had enhanced and enriched our lives down through the years. In joy and in sorrow they had stood by us, seeing us through it all.

## *I Love to Sing the Old Songs*

Oh I love to get my old book out, and sing the old songs again
Like a dear old friend they comfort me
Through my joy and through my pain
Yes I love to sing the dear old songs I sang down through the years
Like hark don't you hear the turtle dove
I sang when I was but three

*Chorus:*
The bower of prayer my native home
I sang when I was quite young
The dear old songs the good old songs
Have stood by me for so long!

Now my passing years have not been kind
My dimming eyes have slipped away from me
Oh but when I take that old book out
I can see as plain as day

And across the green fields and mountainside
Down the old back roads of home
I meet my loved ones there oh the joy we share
When I sing those dear old songs

*Repeat Chorus*

## Old Calloused Hands

This was written in the early '70s for one of my sisters. She married a coal miner and had nine children. But except for maybe the very early years, it never seemed to be a good marriage. She had to work really hard all her life. Before she married, she worked as a domestic, cooking and cleaning for the bosses at the mines, and later in a factory and laundry. One day during a visit to my parents' house in Baltimore, she took me upstairs and told me how she was mistreated by her husband. He told her that she was no more than a maid to him, and that if it wasn't for the cleaning and cooking she did, he would have thrown her out long ago. I was absolutely furious. I asked her to move out and come to Baltimore to live with us, and that we'd take care of her. But she wouldn't do it, mainly because of the children. She never left him. He died of black lung, and she died of breast cancer. She was one of the best and most loving persons I've ever known. This song is for her.

### *Old Calloused Hands*

If you don't think she's had it hard my friend
Just take a look at where this woman's been

Take a look at her old worn-out calloused hands
Take a look at loneliness that never ends

Old calloused hands don't bring you much cheer
When they're all you've got to show for bygone years
A few kind words a love song to draw near
But her hard times didn't leave such souvenirs

Now she worked hard and slaved her life away
For her husband and for her family
Now she's shoved aside like some old worn-out shoe
That's her reward for all that she's been through

Her tears you'll never see 'neath all that pride
And the things she long hoped for she's put aside
I look at her and Lord I wanna cry
To think how many times that woman died

Old calloused hands don't bring you much cheer
When you're left behind like all the forgotten years
A few kind words a love song to draw near
But her hard times didn't leave such souvenirs

## Rocking Chair Blues

Sometime in the late '60s, I wrote this song about my parents. They had eleven children, and after the last one left home, following several other brothers and sisters up to Baltimore, Maryland, my parents decided to move up there as well. Most of the children were in Baltimore, except for three who stayed in West Virginia and never moved away. So my parents left West Virginia for good and moved up to Baltimore. They were happy to be near their children, but unfortunately they never did take to city life, and didn't really fit in. They were old-fashioned and set in their ways and stayed home a lot unless they went to church. Most of their friends were from the church

and they were few in number. They missed the old crowd back home who they'd known most of their lives, especially the members from their church. So in their declining years my father said to my mother, "Sarah, let's catch the Greyhound and go back and see the mountains and our old friends one last time." They took that farewell trip back to West Virginia, and that was the last time they went home. They passed away in '78 and '79, nine months apart, and are both buried in Baltimore.

## *Rocking Chair Blues*

Rock on rock your blues away
Old rocking chairs help pass the time of day
Your kids have gone their way, it's the price you pay
Old and in the way is here to stay
There ain't gonna be no chance to turn around
There's more yesterdays than tomorrows left now
And when your number's called, the lid on your casket falls
There's no more crying no more dying for you—you know

So let those old memories come on around
Well they're all you've got to hang on to now
Hair as white as snow, your old mind just comes and goes
But it can't bring back a thing but memory

Rock on the new home you have found
Is a run down apartment in the cheapest part of town
You'd give everything you own
For those old-timey friends back home
And one last look at the hills where you used to roam

Let those old memories come on around
They're all you've got to hang on to now
Hair as white as snow your old mind just comes and goes
But it can't bring back a thing but memory

Let those old memories come on around
'Till it's time to lay your tired old body down
He will gently bid you come

Where no parting songs are sung
And all your crying and your dying will be done

## Pretty Bird

"Pretty Bird" was about the same kind of situation that inspired "Scars from an Old Love." I spent a lot of time trying to get up the nerve to trust someone again. I was thinking that I wanted to be a liberated woman, and do all those things that liberated women do. I dated a few guys who were "supposedly" willing to give me that kind of space, but I found that I wasn't as ready for it as I thought I was. I was still a somewhat backwoodsy little girl still partially tied to the old ideas and constraints. But another part of me very much needed to be free of them so I could enjoy my new life and freedom. It was a crucial time in my life, a time of growth and learning, of leavings and beginnings. Coming from such an isolated area and a different culture, I felt like I was always trying to play catch-up in my life and workplace. I envied the little bird sitting on the high wire. It could fly away at any given moment and be free. So in 1972 I wrote this song.

### *Pretty Bird*

Fly away little pretty bird
Fly fly away, fly away little pretty bird
And pretty you'll always stay

I see in your eyes a promise
Your own tender love you'll bring
But fly away little pretty bird
Cold runneth the spring

Love's own tender flames warms this meeting
And love's tender songs you'd sing
But fly away little pretty bird
And pretty you'll always stay

I cannot make you no promise
Love is such a delicate thing
Fly away little pretty bird
For he'd only clip your wings

Fly away little pretty bird
Fly fly away
Fly away little pretty bird
And pretty you'll always stay

Fly far beyond the dark mountain
To where you'll be free ever more
Fly away little pretty bird
Where the cold winter winds don't blow

## Mount Zion's Lofty Heights

This song came to me in the late '60s right out of the blue. I have no idea where it came from. It was a very easy song to write, probably because I grew up hearing a lot of hymn singing. I only sang it a few times, but I don't believe I ever sang it on stage. I didn't even get around to recording it until I made the new project with Rounder in 2004.

### *Mount Zion's Lofty Heights*

Mount Zion's lofty heights there stands
A bright and peaceful place
Where weary souls can rest so free
Amid His loving grace

The day is near, the hour is nigh
The sheep with restless, mournful cries
They long to journey there tonight
Mount Zion's lofty heights

The narrow pathway's steep and rough
The wayside dangers fright
Within the vineyard of His love's
Mount Zion's lofty heights

The spirit from this poor trembling soul
From this earthly mortal man
Will fly on wings of heavenly doves
On lofty heights to stand

## Cowboy Jim

Sometimes when I went to Baltimore to visit my parents, at some point during the weekend my father would get out the Baptist songbooks and we would sing for a while. Often I would find a song that had interesting lyrics, especially the poetic ones, and I would ask him to teach me the melody. So he became more interested in teaching the tunes to me when he realized I was serious about learning the old songs. He would also try to remember other types of songs as well. On this particular day, probably in late 1963, he began to sing an old cowboy song, but due to a fading memory he could only recall a line or two. So he said, "You take it and make a song out of it, and give it that old lonesome sound." He liked old-time music and was an old-time banjo picker in his younger days. So I took what little he sang and wrote "Cowboy Jim." When I recorded it in the '60s, I think he was surprised, but proud, that I actually wrote the song and that he had been part of it.

### *Cowboy Jim*

Out on the range I rode one day
Looking for cowboy Jim
There I spied the girl I loved
Riding the range with him

They were singing old songs that we used to sing
And I knew she had done me wrong
So I turned my old Pinto around again
And I rode all night long

*Chorus:*
Won't you come down, down in town pal
Good times for you and me
Forget your old gal you know she's cold pal
You know she's been untrue

One bright evening as the sun went down
This cowboy was feeling low
Sitting there talking to my partner Joe
He said cowboy you sure look blue

*Repeat Chorus*

## Little Lenaldo

I wrote this song in 1981 after reading a true story in the newspaper about this grower down in Florida who hired a lot of migrant workers to work for him picking fruit. He also let children work long hours in the hot sun with very little pay. The article mentioned a little eleven-year-old boy named Lenaldo. Lenaldo got up at dawn and worked all day in the fields picking strawberries. The grower paid him five cents a box, but strawberries retailed for about eight times that much, and all the money went to the grower. The migrants barely had enough to eat or to pay their rent. That's why the kid had to work. The parents needed the extra money to pay bills. Lenaldo never had leisure time like other kids to run and play. His days spent in the fields were long and exhausting. They got home at dusk, and the mother who had also been in the fields cooked supper. After that was over, it was time to get ready for bed and the next day. They had to be up and ready to go by dawn. After I read that article, it stayed on my mind until I finally had to write a song about it.

### *Little Lenaldo*

Little Lenaldo he's only eleven years old
He gets up at dawn to work in the fields all day
For a mean boss man, who'll abuse and never think twice
He's known for cheap labor and a heart that's cold as ice

Poor little Lenaldo, poor little ragged child
Poor little child so young and so mild
Oh what's to become of him

Little Lenaldo no time ever to run and play
Work is barely finished 'till it's time to start another day
Grey-haired little children growing old before their time
Their dreams lay dying they just rotted on the vine

How can it be we stand and just look away
Pretend not to see this man destroy a little child
In the fields of plenty starving out his time
But for chance or blessings
He could be a child of yours or mine

Poor little Lenaldo, poor little ragged child
Poor little child so young and so mild
Oh what's to become of him
Underpaid, underfed, he's worked like a dog everyday
Poor little child so young and so mild
Oh what's to become of him?

## Tomorrow's Already Lost

This song was written in the late '60s for a sister, a very sweet and dear soul, who however always seemed to choose the wrong people to have a lasting relationship with. There always seemed to be a "loser" waiting in the wings to take advantage of her. Unfortunately, she never learned to tell them apart.

### *Tomorrow's Already Lost*

*Chorus:*
Down where the beer and wine and the liquor flows
Down along sorrow streets where all her misery grows
Searching for a home I know she'll never find
Searching for a little love the kind she's never had

Her fears she hides within her eyes, the torment in her soul
The loved ones who've forgotten her don't need her no more
The demons from some hellish world, who speak to her so low
And bid her come into their world and be lost forever more

Her loved ones turn from her in shame the scorn deep in their eyes
They'll never claim part of the blame, they don't want her around
So she turns to a stranger for love at any cost
She's waiting for tomorrow, but tomorrow's already lost

They'll come for her tomorrow, they'll lock her up awhile
Until she can stand alone and learn again to smile
And then she'll start all over, she'll walk the streets downtown
Where plenty of men are just waiting to help and drag her down

*Repeat Chorus*

## I Can't Find Your Love Anymore

I had been writing on this song for quite a while before I finished it in 1996. I'd leave it and come back to it, but couldn't seem to get anywhere with it until I started playing around with a new melody and chord pattern. Then I got more excited about finishing it. Since I'm a traditional singer, I'm basically a G/C/D person. So this new chord structure was a little different, and it took a while to get used to. Once I got over the fact that I wasn't being

too unfaithful to the "old school," the old way of doing things, I started to like the new tune much better, and I realized I'd been getting in my own way. It also freed me up to be able to write the third verse, which is probably my favorite in the whole song.

### *I Can't Find Your Love Anymore*

My heart's been pounded with grief and sorrow
My tears have lingered too long
Once bedded in clover now the weeds have took over
And I can't find your love anymore

*Chorus:*
For love comes early or love comes too late
Or love don't come at all
Come back to me when love runs truer
And your heart melts like the snow

I followed your dreams down long lonesome highways
To places where love had no home
But sorrow soon found us wrapped heartache around us
All our fields were overgrown

Somewhere out on some wild brushy mountain
There are wild flowers the eye has never seen
Like places in my heart where you never dared to wander
And love has waited long to be set free

*Repeat Chorus*

## Hills of Home

A lot of the mines have shut down around where I came from in West Virginia, and so many other businesses were forced to close as well. A lot of boomtowns shrunk in size and discontinued some city services like local

transportation. Small coal camps became ghost towns compared to their heyday. When I was younger, I could take the train or bus right to my hometown. Now when I take the train, I have to get off twenty-nine miles from my destination, and it only runs three days a week. Strangely enough, those of us who were born and raised there still call it home and try to visit as often as we can—which reminds me of a time back in the seventies when I was playing a festival in West Virginia. After it was over, a friend and I decided that we would attend this rally put on by the coal miners while they were on strike. It was way out on some little country road in the middle of nowhere near the mines. I was working a day job up north in the city and playing music on the weekends, so I had not been home to West Virginia in a long time. As we drove deeper and deeper into the mountains, down tree-lined roads along the river's edge, a great wave of nostalgia swept over me. I was emotionally moved by being here in this mountainous terrain. It felt good to be surrounded by mountains so close I could almost reach out and touch them, comforting me with a sense of place and belonging, which I had not felt in a long time, connecting me to my native roots. No longer was I confused about where home was—I *was* home!

## *Hills of Home*

There ain't much that's left there that ain't all run-down
Gone are the echoes of old familiar sounds
Of families that's scattered, parted and gone
And left a lot of good things to wither away back home

*Chorus:*
Can't you feel those hills around you
Can't you feel a touch of home
And don't you wish you'd never gone
There are some things memories can't bring home

Hills of home hills of home, families scattered off and gone
These old hills that've been passed by
Well they've seen a lot of leaving in their time

Old familiar dirt roads winds through the piney glades
Where all the longings of childhood dreams where made

The flowery paths the mossy mounds where I could run and play
Never a care to cross my mind all the livelong day

*Repeat Chorus*

## Old River

This song was written in the late sixties and early seventies. I was heavy into the old-time and bluegrass sound, like the Stanleys, Monroe, Don Reno and Red Smiley, the Louvin Brothers, Osborne Brothers, Wilma Lee and Stoney Cooper, Jim and Jesse—the list goes on. I knew most of the songs of that period by heart. I think all of that strong material from the fifties, sixties, and seventies spurred me on to start writing my own songs. Up until that time I had written only a few songs. I became more and more adventurous in the seventies and eighties and more prolific as a songwriter. This song came out of that period. I recorded it on a CD that came out in 1998 called "Heart of a Singer." The song was used on a movie soundtrack, *Evidence of Blood,* on cable TV a couple of years ago. I have never seen the movie.

### *Old River*

Old river you're wide you're deep and cold
You make a lonesome old sound as onward you roll
'Neath the crest of your waves I know I could sleep
And forget all this sorrow he's brought to me

Many's the time and many's the night
We sat here talking making things right
You heard every vow you heard all our plans
Old river I know that you understand

The dawn is breaking on sea and on land
As I write my farewell upon your sand

Your waves will embrace me my body you'll claim
Old river old river you're calling my name

Oh the ways of love is oft times bold
Like the hearts of lovers when love turns cold
River old river your depths dark and deep
In a watery grave forever I'll sleep

## Will Jesus Wash the Bloodstains from Your Hands?

This is an anti-war song that I wrote during the Nixon years. At the time I had this scary thought, the fear that we might get into a nuclear war. I was also thinking about my nephew who was in the Korean War, who was in two major battles by the time he was eighteen or nineteen. He was so messed up when he returned he couldn't cope. So he took a gun and killed himself. I thought, what a waste of human life. Wars have far-reaching tentacles. We all know who really pulled that trigger. It seems as a civilized society we should practice being a little more civilized. Try a bit more diplomacy before we bomb each other into oblivion.

### *Will Jesus Wash the Bloodstains from Your Hands?*

I saw a gray-haired mother crying softly in her door
As she gazed upon the pathway where he'd return no more
Oh Lord I'd love to hold my baby just once more
And Lord I hope I never live to see another war

Will Jesus wash the bloodstains from your hands?
Will he welcome you into that peaceful land?
Will he forgive the killings, the wars you have planned?
Will Jesus wash the bloodstains from your hands?

The bombs you've dropped, the guns you've shot, all in the name of peace
While the people begged for mercy, you gave them no relief
There's blood on your hands mister, you'll answer for one day
The tears you shed on that day won't wash your sins away

Now you say we can survive a nuclear war
That you would use limits, you'd only go so far
Well Hiroshima's horror, we'll never forget
For bloodthirsty warriors don't know when to quit

## They'll Never Keep Us Down

I wrote "They'll Never Keep Us Down" in 1976 for the Academy Award–winning film *Harlan County, USA.* The film is about a strike and a bitter fight between the Brookside Mine and its parent, Duke Power Company, and the United Mine Workers. It was the first time I had been commissioned to write a song, and to challenge me further, the song was going to be the ending song for the entire film. So it had to be a very strong song. They wanted an "upbeat type" song to lift people's spirits to unify and strengthen the bond between working people everywhere. On top of that, they had a deadline and wanted the song as soon as possible, for they were going to enter the film in the New York Film Festival just a few weeks away. So to inspire me and spur me on, they brought me up to New York to see the film still in the editing stages. I took notes and wrote down some of the more memorable quotes, and I tried to use some of them in the song to give the workers more of a voice. As I wrote, I would get on the phone and read what I had to the producer or editor, and if they didn't think it was quite there, I would rewrite it. It was important to me to make sure that they got what they wanted, so I rewrote it until they were really happy with it. Then I put together a local band and went into the studio and cut it in a few hours and express-mailed it up to them in time to meet the deadline.

The producer, Barbara Kopple, invited me to come to the opening of the

film in New York and do some music. At the end of the film, while my song was still playing over the credits, they turned the sound down and I came out with my band and did the song live. It was very exciting, but a bit strange, for I'd never done anything like that before, and also I barely knew the song. It was the first time I had performed it before an audience, and this wasn't just any audience; it was the New York Film Festival, held in the fancy Alice Tully Hall—a far cry from the coal camps and hollers of West Virginia.

Barbara Kopple decided to have an opening in Harlan County for all the people she had made the film for, and I was invited to go and do some singing for them as well. The more I thought about singing my song for the very people I wrote it for, the more excited I got. I knew they would identify with me, for I was raised the same way, and my relatives had gone through the same struggles as they had. So we had plenty to share and talk about and they seemed to really enjoy the music. Some of us ended up spending the night with one of the women in the film. She cooked for us and we played music for her. It felt a lot more natural to me than Alice Tully Hall. The film went on to win an Academy Award, and because I had four songs on the soundtrack, I began to get a lot of calls to do more and more music—especially from grassroots organizations. Most would show the film, and I and a band of pickup musicians would do a set or two of songs that included my songs that were on the soundtrack. I especially did a bunch of benefits in 1978 and 1979 for the Stearns Strike in Stearns, Kentucky (a strike very much like the one in Harlan County). They were held in different areas, from New York City to Kentucky. And of course they were all great stages for those coal-mining songs, plus they raised awareness and some much-needed funds as the strike went into its second year. They also held a rally for the strikers and their families in Stearns to lift their spirits and show support. Some musician friends and I decided to go and play for them. The women all brought food and we brought the music. Afterwards, the musicians decided we would drive up the mountain to the picket line and play a few songs for them. We women didn't know how we'd be received, for up until then no women had been up there. But it turned out fine. Both male and female musicians played. Some local folks heard us and dropped by, and a few danced a little. I sang my song "They'll Never Keep Us Down," and when I got to the part that says "We've been shot and we've been jailed, Lord it's a sin," I happened to look down at the ground and lying next to my

feet was an empty cartridge. I looked at the little shed they'd built to get in when it rained or take shelter from whatever, and it was full of bullet holes. As we drove back down the mountain, the tired weary faces of the miners still haunted me. I kept thinking of them up there keeping their lonely vigil, being shot at, all because they're asking for a living wage and a union to protect them from the wealthy mine owners who had been ripping off hard-working people for years and thinking of those tired working-class heroes perched upon that mountain like sitting ducks. I couldn't help but think how the rest of us in society will benefit from their sacrifices, directly or indirectly, and what a small contribution most of us ever actually make to take a stand against the evils of injustice.

## *They'll Never Keep Us Down*

United we stand, divided we fall
For every dime they give us, a battle must be fought
So working people use your power, the key to liberty
Don't support the rich man's style of luxury

And there ain't no way they can ever keep us down, oh no,
There ain't no way they can ever keep us down
We won't be bought, we won't be sold, to be treated right, well that's our goal
And there ain't no way they can ever keep us down

Well we've been shot and we've been jailed, Lord it's a sin
Women and little children stood right by the men
But we got that union contract that keeps a worker free
And they'll never shoot that union out of me

They'll never shoot that union out of me oh no,
They'll never shoot that union out of me
Got a contract in our hands, signed by the blood of honest men
And they'll never shoot that union out of me

Well the power wheel is rolling, rolling right along
And the government helps keep it going, going strong
So working people get your help from your own kind
Your welfare ain't on that rich man's mind

Your welfare ain't on that rich man's mind, oh no,
Your welfare ain't on that rich man's mind
They want the power in their hands, just to keep down the worker
and,
Your welfare ain't on that rich man's mind

They'll never, never, never keep us down, oh no,
They'll never, never, never keep us down
They can cheat, lie, frame or kill, but we'll stop that big wheel
And they'll never, never, never keep us down

## Mannington Mine Disaster

This song is about a mine explosion at Consolidation Number 9 in Farmington, West Virginia, on November 20, 1968. Twenty-one miners got out, but seventy-eight were trapped in the mine. Their spouses waited at the mouth of the mine for ten days, but there was no hope of anyone else coming out. So the mine owners sealed the mine shut. The widows sadly returned home without their husbands. Ironically, while the mine was still exploding, the corrupt president of the UMW, Tony Boyle, went on television and said that consol 9 was one of the safest mines around. The truth was No. 9 was in one of the nation's gassiest seams of coal. Eight million cubic feet of methane seeped into No. 9 every twenty-four hours. And for five years prior to the explosion, all sixteen inspections done by the Bureau of Mines had cited consol 9 for insufficient rock dusting, which was, if done right, the best safety procedure around. A short time after the explosion I was part of a group of musicians who went down to Mannington to do a free concert for the victim's families, friends, and loved ones. I had just written "Mannington Mine Disaster" a short while before, and I was nervous about singing it there. There's a line that says "because of unsafe conditions your daddy died." I looked out into the audience and there was one of the women sitting there with her young son—a moment of truth I won't forget soon! It was really gratifying to share my song with them!

## *Mannington Mine Disaster*

We read in the paper and the radio tells
Us to raise our children to be miners as well
Tell them how safe the mines are today
And to be like daddy bring home a big pay

*Chorus:*
Now don't you believe them my boy that story's a lie
Remember the disaster at the Mannington mine
Where 78 miners were buried alive
Because of unsafe conditions your daddy died

They lure you with money it sure is a sight
When you may never live to see daylight
With your name among the big headlines
Like that awful disaster at the Mannington mine

There's a man in a big house way upon the hill
Far, far from the shack where the poor miner lives
He's got plenty of money Lord everything's fine
And he has forgotten the Mannington mine
Forgotten forgotten the Mannington mine

There is a grave way down in the Mannington mine
There is a grave way down in the Mannington mine
Oh what were their last thoughts what were their cries
As the flames overtook them in the Mannington mine

*Repeat Chorus*
How can God forgive you, you do know what you've done
You've killed my husband now you want my son

# Coal Miner's Grave

In a hilltop cemetery overlooking Holly Grove in Paint Creek, West Virginia, is a hand-hewn granite grave marker that says, "Dedicated to the Memory of Francis F. Estep, for distinguished service and self-sacrifice in the cause of labor and advancement of the United Mine Workers of America." For years the grave lay hidden in the weeds and underbrush, until a student from the West Virginia Institute of Technology stumbled upon it one day. Interviews with the Estep children revealed that they had not been able to find their father's marker, the reason being it had been put in the wrong place. The West Virginia Labor History Association sponsored a rededication and memorial ceremony, attended by Estep's children, on the Sunday before Labor Day, 1975. His son Clifford, who was in his mother's arms when his father was shot dead right in front of them, said it was the happiest day of his life to see his father get some appreciation for his sacrifice. A certain mystery still surrounds the monument. To this day no one from the UMWA seems to know who from the union placed it on the grave or when. All who might know are deceased.

Francis Estep was gunned down by gun thugs hired by mine operators at Paint and Cabin Creek during a strike at a non-union mine. He was at home with his wife and baby son Clifford. His wife was seven months pregnant at the time. His brother and some friends were there talking about the strike when they heard shots at about 10:30 P.M. coming from a slow-moving train with its lights out going past their house. Estep grabbed a gun and ran outside and hollered to his wife to take the baby and run to the cellar. She headed for the back of the house just as Estep rounded the corner to guard her. But it was too late. The shower of bullets had begun coming from the darkened train. There were about one hundred in all, nineteen of which went through the clothing of Maud Estep and baby Clifford. They were not hurt, but one fatal shot hit Estep in the face and he fell dead at his wife's feet. She sat the baby down, took the gun from her dead husband, and emptied it at the train as it disappeared in the dark of the night. They took her to the hospital the next day and took her husband to the graveyard. She was too distraught to

attend his funeral. Her baby girl was born two months later, and was named Francis Francesco after her husband. As they buried her husband on the hilltop at Holly Grove, the mine guards kept firing bullets into the crowd of friends and relatives who came to pay their respects.

Maud Estep never stepped foot in the little bullet-ridden house in Holly Grove again. There were no Social Security or union benefits there in 1913. So she was unable to support herself or her children. She later remarried, but was widowed again in a few years. She died in 1955 in Greenbriar County, West Virginia. There's a lot more to this story; this is only a brief outline. This song was written in 1983 with little information to go on, and revised some after reading the full story in a West Virginia traditional magazine called *Goldenseal*.

## *Coal Miner's Grave*

Up there on that hillside there's a coal miner's grave
And the briars and bushes about cover it up these days
For there's no one to claim it or care if he's gone away
For he was only a miner and it's only a coal miner's grave

So pay no attention it's only a coal miner's grave
Pay no attention to the briars and the weeds let them stay
For who's gonna miss him or care that he's gone away
For he was only a miner and it's only a coal miner's grave

Francis Estep from Holly Grove W. VA.
In nineteen and thirteen loaded coal ten hours a day
Six days a week forty seven and a half cents a ton
He was shot down by gun thugs at the young age of thirty one

So the briars and brambles ramble all over his grave
Like the thorns in his life for just living he had to pay
Now there's no one to miss him or care if he's gone away
For he was only a miner and it's only a coal miner's grave

So is this little marker his only memorial today
A man who gave his life for the UMW of A
Is this how we remember all the sacrifices he made
To let the briars and the weeds take over his union and grave

# Black Lung

My oldest brother Thurman died of black lung disease, and so did two of my brothers-in-law. I think watching him die was the main inspiration for the song. When he was near death, I went back home for three weeks to sit up with him. He was born, lived, and died poor. He didn't even have enough money to bury himself. His horrible death took a toll on me and affected the way I thought. My song, written in 1969, really came from the gut. I didn't hold anything back. I didn't fully realize until after I wrote it what I had. My brother never heard the song. It got a lot of recognition. I was asked to sing for a protest meeting sponsored by the United Mine Workers down in Horse Creek, Kentucky, to challenge the Social Security Administration. A lot of miners were not receiving benefits, and the black lung victims were being ignored. A lot of union members, lawyers, and activists such as the VISTA people were present. Walter Cronkite and the *CBS Evening News* broadcast a portion of the meeting, and my song got a lot of coverage on national television. I began to get a lot of requests to sing it at union meetings.

## *Black Lung*

He's had more hard luck than most men could stand
The mines were his first love, but never his friend
He's lived a hard life, and hard he'll die
Black lung's done got him, his time is nigh

Black lung, black lung you're just biding your time
Soon all this suffering I'll leave behind
But I can't help but wonder what God had in mind
To send such a devil, to claim this soul of mine

He went to the boss man, but he closed the door
It seems you're not wanted, when you're sick and you're poor
You're not even covered in their medical plans
And your life depends on the favors of man

Down in the poorhouse on starvation's plan
Where pride is a stranger and doomed is a man
His soul full of coal dust 'till his body's decayed
Everyone but black lung's done turned him away

Black lung, black lung your hand's icy cold
As you reach for my life and you torture my soul
Cold as that waterhole down in that dark cave
Where I spent my life's blood digging my own grave

Down at the graveyard, the boss man came
With his little bunch of flowers
Dear God! What a shame
Take back those flowers, don't sing no sad songs
The die has been cast now
A good man is gone

## Coal Mining Woman

It was one of the only two songs that I've been commissioned to write. The other one was "They'll Never Keep Us Down." I wrote "Coal Mining Women" in 1984 for a little documentary by Appalshop Films on mining women made in Whitesburg, Kentucky. It's a short film that talks about how women are discriminated against when they go to work in the coal mines. It was not an easy song to write. They wanted something a little different from my usual traditional style; that is, they didn't want old-time or bluegrass. So I decided to sing it in a bluesy country style, and gave the band permission to improvise as much as they wanted to on their breaks. They had never heard the song before, and since I'd just written it, I had not as yet tried it with a band. So it was fun working it out together from scratch. We finally got a cut that not only pleased us, but was different enough to please the film company as well.

*Coal Mining Woman*

I got the woman coal miners blues
And just like you I've got the right to choose
A job with decent pay a better chance to make my way
And if you can't stand by me don't stand in my way

Well we had the babies kept the home fires burning bright
Walked the picket line in the thickest of the fight
Yes we helped you open doors and we can help you open more
If you can't stand by me don't stand in my way

I'm entitled to work a job that is free
From intimidations that are forced on me
From men who are out of line out of step with time
If you can't stand by me don't stand in my way

Now union brothers don't you think the time is right
That we stick together and unite
Some better seeds to sow and help this union grow
And if you stand by me I'll surely stand by you

We must work together to change the things that's wrong
For better conditions we've waited much too long
Health and safety have to be a first priority
And the change can only come through you and me

## The Yablonski Murder

This song was inspired by the murder in 1971 of Jock Yablonski and his wife. At the time he was running a strong campaign against Tony Boyle for the presidency of the United Mine Workers. Boyle hired some gun thugs who killed Yablonski, his wife, and daughter. When I read about the murders in the newspaper, I was enraged. I sat down immediately and wrote the song,

without very many details to go on. I later rewrote the third verse. One time right after the song was written and old wounds were still raw from the Boyle and Yablonski episode, I was asked to sing for a UMWA convention. One of the organizers asked me not to sing the song, for some of Boyle's supporters were going to be there, and they weren't sure how they would react to the song. But mainly they wanted the opportunity to win their support, so that they could start getting the union back on solid ground again.

## *The Yablonski Murder*

Clarksville Pennsylvania is not too far from here
Coal miners were hoping for a brighter New Year
But for Jock Yablonski, his daughter and wife
The New Year brought an ending to their precious lives

Well it's cold blooded murder friends, I'm talking about
Now who's gonna stand up and who's gonna fight
You better clean up that union, put it on solid ground
Get rid of that dirty trash, that keeps a working man down

Death bells were ringing as Jock made his plans
To save the U.M.W. for honest working men
So he ran against Tony Boyle, and all his dirty clan
But Tony hired a hit man, that was Jock's fatal end

Jock Yablonski was a coal miner's friend
He fought for the rights of the working man
He begged the law to protect him, but they turned him down
Now Jock, his wife and daughter all lay beneath the ground

Oh Lord the poor miner, will his fight never end
They'll abuse even murder him to further their plans
Oh where is his victory how will it stand?
It'll stand when poor working men all join hands

# Clay County Miner

My inspiration for writing this song came from an event I was asked to sing at in eastern Kentucky. They wanted me to sing my song "Black Lung" for a public hearing on the issue of black lung benefits being denied to disabled miners in Kentucky. The hearing was organized by a group called Mountain People's Rights. Their lawyers and organizers were trying to help a movement of disabled miners from Clay County, in eastern Kentucky, get their benefits. While they were sympathetic to the miners, the doctors who filed the claims reports were not, and were often hostile. So 78 percent of the claims filed were being turned down. Mountain People's Rights' folks turned to Maxine Kenny, who had press contacts and would be sympathetic to their cause, to help publicize the fact that such a large percentage of claims were falling through the cracks. She saw quickly that the story deserved a lot more than a mere press conference and a few news releases. So they decided to *make* news, to hold a public hearing on the issue. For several weeks they worked with the disabled miners to prepare for a public hearing. The miners would be the interrogators, and "experts" from the disabled miners' membership would testify as well as medical and legal experts. Over 800 people attended the Hearing held in November 1970, in Horse Creek, Kentucky. The news coverage prodded the conscience of Congress and the general public who thought that things had been taken care of with the passage of the Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1970. Maxine had convinced a dozen journalists to attend the hearing and excellent stories appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, and many others.

As for me and my part in all this, I was overcome with compassion and empathy for these poor souls. I had never been in a room before with so many poor and disabled people. I was raised the same way as they were, so I knew of their hardships and suffering. We had buried my oldest brother a few years before, the one who died of black lung and without benefits. Welfare had to pay for his benefits. So when I got up to sing my song "Black Lung," I was filled with compassion as I looked out at the carnage of human wreckage the wealthy coal companies had left behind for someone else to

pick up and care for. I was so moved by that experience that I went home and wrote "Clay County Miner." I got a chance to sing it to them when they came to Washington to lobby for their benefits. It was a rare moment and one that time has not dimmed! This group of brave men went on to organize the Kentucky Black Lung Association.

### *Clay County Miner*

He's a poor man 'cause mining's all he's known
And miners don't get rich loadin' coal
He's a sick man 'cause that coal dust took its stand
But he don't expect to get no help from that operator man

*Chorus:*
Well it's good-bye old-timer, I guess our time has come
Those waterholes that dirty coal dust eatin' up our lungs
We'll leave this world just as poor as the day we saw the sun
Well it's good-bye old-timer all your mining is done

I remember the time when I could load more coal than any man
Now my health is gone buried in, down in that dirty ground
And they've taken away my rights and privilege to be a man
But I know that I can't tell all that to that operator man

Remember old-timer when we were little kids
And we'd talk about mining days when we got grown and big
But now we're old broken men they don't need us around
Though we gave our lives to make them rich they won't give us a dime

*Repeat Chorus*

## My Heart's Own Love

The inspiration for this song came sometime in 2002 after an evening spent with an old friend over dinner and then listening to music. We had a lot to

talk about since we both are survivors in the male-dominated world of bluegrass. We filled each other in on our business and social lives, and then the conversation turned to "men" and we both readily agreed that *a good man is hard to find.* But somehow here on planet Earth she was able to snag one! We spoke a lot about relationships, band-wise and in our private lives, and I said how lucky she was to have such a special supportive relationship not only at home but on the road as well. That part of the conversation lingered with me, and the next day as I was preparing my lunch I began singing the chorus to this song right out of the blue. After lunch, I got my guitar and tape machine and wrote this song in two hours. It's the first positive love song I've ever written. It was such a nice experience, and I may try it again!

## *My Heart's Own Love*

I was wandering along life's highway
Lost and lonely as one could be
Looking for my own true lover
One I thought I would never see

*Bridge:*
Just when I thought I'd never know love
Just when my dreams all fell apart
I look up from the deepening shadows
And you were standing next to my heart

*Chorus:*
Bless your heart you are my darling
Bless your soul you are the one
Bless the fate that brought you to me
At last I found my heart's own love

Sometimes we wander like lonely pilgrims
Like old soldiers who long for home
Hoping when our journey's ended
We'll find the sweetest peace we've known

*Repeat Bridge and Chorus*

# America's Poor

I started writing this song in 2002 during all of those corporate scandals involving white-collar crooks stealing off the very people they were getting paid to protect. Talk about "vapors"—they put the cows to shame! I also kept hearing stories from people who had been laid off because the factory or business had left the U.S. and moved south of the border, leaving behind thousands upon thousands of decent hardworking people who'd spent a good part and sometimes all of their youth slaving for these money-grubbing factory owners. It came home to me when one of my nieces fell prey to the same injustice. She had spent years working in this factory and had worked her way up to being in charge of several people. The boss asked her to train a new crop of workers. She did and thought nothing about it, until she got her notice that she was laid off. They closed the factory and took their new youthful employees, freshly trained by my niece, and moved south of the border. What *really* stuck in my craw was that they *used* her like a worn-out mop. They mopped up the floor with her and then threw her away. She was and is a loyal, decent, salt-of-the-earth-type person. It all impacted on her well-being, now pushing sixty-some and in failing health. They left her high and dry—no insurance, no retirement, no nothing. There are a million stories like this all over the country. Money, power, and greed are like incurable diseases once you become consumed by them. You can't get rid of them. The more you get, the more you want. The side effects are the lives they wreck. The pity is that they leave no one behind to clean up the wreckage.

## *America's Poor*

Well you don't know my name
But you sure know my face
You've seen me a million times
In some laboring place

Although we're worlds apart
I'm in your daily plan
For I bring you fame and fortune
With my own two working hands

We're America's poor
Oh yes, we're living right here
And poverty's door
It just won't hold anymore
No name or no face
We have lost our place
We fell through the cracks
Looking for the tracks
Of the American dream

There's a man on the corner
With a tin cup in his hand
Though he fought in two wars
His nightmares are still Vietnam

They gave him medals and promises
Now the streets and a shelter's his home
He just stands there in rags
With his medals and begs
And wonders what on Earth went wrong

All the factories are closing, going down where labor is cheap
And they've cheated their workers, out of pensions and their lifelong dreams
Too old to start over, they will lose everything that they own
But south of the border a new factory's in order
To cheat their workers again

# Freedom's Disciple (Working-Class Heroes)

This song was written in 1980 for people like Sarah Ogan Gunning, Nimrod Workman, and Florence Reece, about how they paved the road that a lot of us have walked on. They're the kind of people I look to when I need faith by my side. I got to sing it for Florence Reece on her eighty-fifth birthday.

## *Freedom's Disciple (Working-Class Heroes)*

Your face reads like a history book, all lined with worried years
It tells of the roads that you have paved, with sacrifice and tears
The hard times have marked you with scars of the past
You are freedom's disciple for the working class

Yes you are freedom's disciple my courage and my pride
It's you that I look to when I need faith by my side
It's you that I worship and not some idol pawn
It's your book of life I read from for the strength to carry on

So now we are walking on the roads, 'cause you spilled your blood and tears
Yes we've been walking in your tracks—your footsteps for years
For all the hurts you've suffered, well we won't let you down
We will die to protect the freedom that you found

Yes freedom's a little bit closer, because you stood your ground
You didn't run when they took their guns and tried to mow you down
Without you the union would be a thing of the past
For you are freedom's disciple for the working class

# The Homeless

I wrote this song in 1976, but unfortunately, it's as true today as it was then. It's shameful to see so many homeless people roaming the streets of one of the richest countries in the world, begging for handouts, barely existing, always living beneath their dignity, lost in the bowels of society. It seems a country as rich as this could do a better job of taking care of its own. We have a real crisis in this country—in denial about the homeless, the abused and neglected children, the abused and neglected elderly, the millions of uninsured hardworking people, the pharmaceutical industry that lines its pockets while picking ours, our doctors who have vested interests in those companies, and our leaders who get big payoffs and let them get away with it. It's time to wake up. The fox is in the henhouse! And it looks like he won't be evicted anytime soon.

## *The Homeless*

Well they're sleeping in the streets all across this nation
Anywhere they can lay their weary bodies down
Homeless and hungry they're herded like cattle
To the soup lines and the kitchens where the handouts are found

Oh the crying of the dying of the people in need
How long must they suffer before you hear their plea
One crumb from your loaf would feed a starving soul
One little coin from your pot of gold

Yes they're sleeping in the streets all across this nation
From every walk of life that you can name
While greedy politicians and white-collar cheaters
Are stealing and robbing hardworking people blind

Well they're made to feel so worthless no good and lazy
By a system that took away their jobs
But when it comes to sacrifice, cutbacks, and layoffs
It's never big corporations, it's the people who lose

# My Love Has Left Me

"My Love Has Left Me" was written in 1990 from an idea that had come to me after watching a late-night TV show many years earlier. It was a talk show that sometimes had musical guests. On this particular night a number of women guests were talking about how after long years of marriage and children and believing they would grow old together, their husbands left them for younger women. One of the guests was an actress who was married to a famous singer and movie star. They had been married for twenty years and had been so close and compatible throughout their married life that she thought they would spend the rest of their lives together. Then out of the blue he left her and never looked back. She was so shocked. It left her emotionally devastated and unable to cope for a long time. She had not seen it coming, for he had kept that side of himself a secret. In her shock and grief she sat down and poured it all out on a piece of paper in the form of a poem, saying her lover had left her and no longer he'd come. Meanwhile, all the rest of the world was moving about as usual—bees humming, flowers blooming—and no one had even noticed that she had died, and would not know it for years to come. Every word of her heart-wrenching poem ached with her love and loneliness for him and with her feelings of abandonment. I was so overwrought by just being a witness to the retelling of heartbreak that I couldn't remember but a line or two of the poem. I went out the next day to a bookstore to see if I could find it, but she had not published it. So this song is made up from the feelings of heartbreak and the loneliness of betrayal she communicated to me as she read her poem on that night many years ago.

## *My Love Has Left Me*

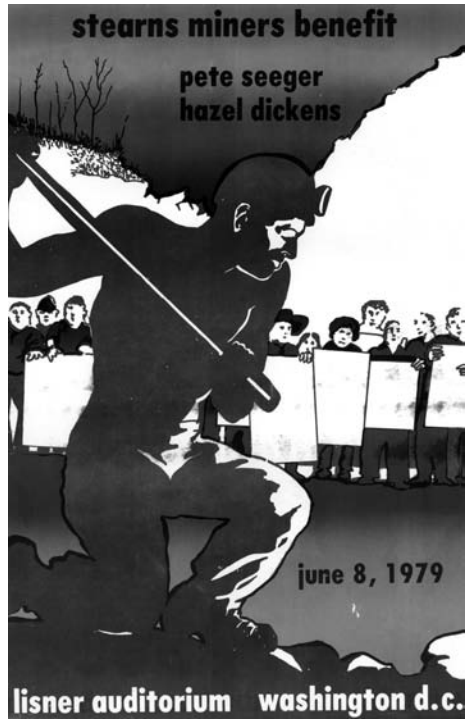
My love has left me no longer he'll come
And all around the world is so free.
And no one has noticed that I'm fading away
For the flowers are all blooming today

*Bridge:*
Down in the meadow the bees they still hum
And the little birds are all so full of cheer.
But I have died here in a river of tears,
And no one will notice, for years and years

Our names are still carved on our favorite tree,
And the wildflowers he once picked for me
Are all mingled with brushes o'er the hill where we played
Like my own heart they're withering away.

*Bridge:*
But the mountain still echoes when I speak his name,
And listens when I shed my lonely tears.
For I have died here in a river of tears,
And no one will notice for years and years.

Playing for a Democratic fund-raising party at Vice President Walter Mondale's home, May 1979. *Left to right:* Akira Otsuka (banjo), Carl Nelson (fiddle), Vice President Mondale, Ralph Rinzler (mandolin), Hazel Dickens (guitar and vocals), Leigh Taylor (bass), John Koparakis (guitar). Used by permission of Walter Mondale.




Poster for a benefit concert for the striking Stearns miners, Lisner Auditorium, Washington, D.C., June 8, 1979.

*Left to right:* Nimrod Workman, Molly Workman (Nimrod's wife, partially hidden), Hazel Dickens, Sarah Ogan Gunning, Phyllis Boyens Liptak.

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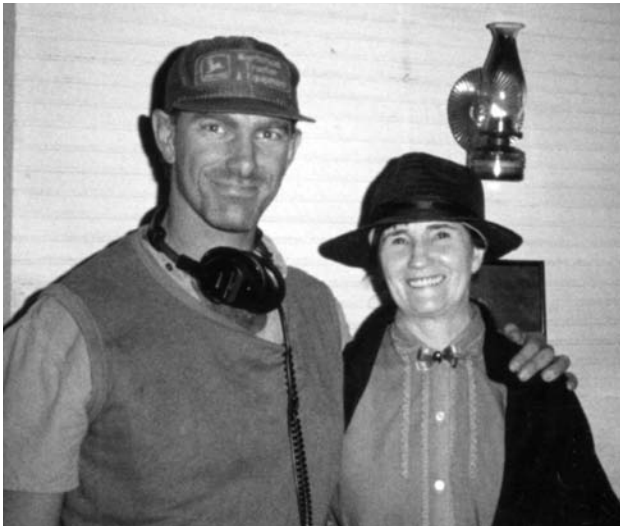
Poster for the Songs of Struggle and Celebration Festival at Northern Illinois University, September 28–30, 1979.

The Johnson Mountain Boys and Hazel Dickens share a marquee in Knoxville, Tennessee, 1985.

Poster for the 1985 Japan tour.

Hazel Dickens had just sung "Freedom's Disciple" for Florence Reece at her eighty-fifth birthday party in 1985. Hazel told her she had composed it for her and for people like her who spend their lives fighting for a better life for working people everywhere. Reece, who wrote the famous labor song "Which Side Are You On?," liked Hazel's song as well.



John Sayles, writer and producer of the film *Matewan,* with Hazel in the outfit she wore in the church scene just finished, October 1985.

CD cover for *It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song*, Rounder 0226, 1987. Courtesy of Rounder Records, *www.rounder.com*.

Hazel Dickens and John Hartford at IBMA in Owensboro, Kentucky, September 1990.

Hazel Dickens in the 1990s. Photograph by Irene Young. Used by permission.

CD cover for *Pioneering Women of Bluegrass*, Smithsonian Folkways 40065, 1996. Courtesy of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, *www.folkways.si.edu.*

CD cover for *Heart of a Singer,* Rounder 0443, 1998. Courtesy of Rounder Records, *www.rounder.com.*

On May 23, 1998, Hazel received an honorary doctorate in humanities from Shepherd College, Shepherdstown, West Virginia, conferred upon her by the college president, David E. Dunlop. Here she is giving her acceptance speech.

Visiting with Hazel at the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, California, October 2001, are Buddy Miller (*left*) and Emmylou Harris. Courtesy of Hardly Strictly Bluegrass.

Hazel singing at the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival, October 2001. Courtesy of Hardly Strictly Bluegrass.

At the Hardly Strictly Bluegrass Festival, October 2001. *Left to right:* Richard Underwood (banjo), Hazel Dickens (vocals and guitar), Dudley Connell (partially hidden; guitar). Courtesy of Hardly Strictly Bluegrass.

Hazel accepts the Folk Alliance's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2002. Photograph by Robert Corwin. Used by permission.

Hazel and her brother Arnold Dickens playing music in West Virginia, Christmas 2003.

Hazel Dickens, Ken Irwin, and Kitsy Kuykendall at IBMA in Nashville, 2006. Photograph by Janet McGarry. Used by permission.

*Left to right:* Eddie Stubbs, Hazel Dickens, and Mac Wiseman at IBMA in Nashville, 2006. Photograph by Dave Roye. Used by permission.

# A Hazel Dickens Discography

The order of entries is by release date.

Format: *Title of LP or CD.* Label and catalog number. Release year. Personnel. Songs on the LP or CD, with reissue information where relevant (title, label, catalog number, and the reissue date if that does not appear as part of its own entry).

Hazel Dickens sings on the soundtracks to the films *Harlan County, USA* (documentary by Barbara Kopple, Cabin Creek Films, 1976); *Matewan* (directed by John Sayles, Cinecom, 1987); *Songcatcher* (directed by Maggie Greenwald, ErgoArts, 2000); and *It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song* (documentary by Mimi Pickering, Appalshop, 2001). Those songs available on CD are listed below.

For archival recordings, see Amy Walker Brown, "'It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song': The Southern Folklife Collection's Manuscripts and Recordings of Women in Country Music," M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, 1997.

A tribute album of Hazel Dickens songs is forthcoming from Rounder Records in 2007. The performers include David Bromberg, Mary Chapin

Carpenter, Roseanne Cash, Elvis Costello, Iris Dement, Emmylou Harris, the Judds, Alison Krauss, Laurie Lewis, Claire Lynch, Joan Osborne, Madeleine Peyroux, Linda Ronstadt, and Rhonda Vincent.

*American Banjo-Tunes and Songs Scruggs Style,* Folkways 2314. Released 1956 [some sources say 1957]. Reissued with sixteen additional tracks as *American Banjo Three Finger and Scruggs Style,* Smithsonian/Folkways 40037, in 1990. Various artists. Hazel Dickens appears on one track, "Cindy." Dick Rittler, vocal, banjo. Accompanied by Bob Baker, vocal, guitar; Hazel Dickens, vocal, bass; Mike Seeger, vocal, banjo; Bob Shanklin, mandolin.

*Mountain Music Played on the Autoharp,* Folkways 2365. Released 1965. Various artists. Hazel Dickens appears on one track, "Tragic Romance." Kilby Snow, autoharp. Accompanied by Hazel Dickens, guitar; Mike Seeger, banjo.

*Who's That Knocking?* Folkways 31055, Verve/Folkways 9005. Released 1965. Reissued with *Won't You Come and Sing for Me,* Folkways 31034, as *Pioneering Women of Bluegrass,* Smithsonian/Folkways 40065. Hazel Dickens, vocal, bass; Alice Gerrard, vocal, guitar. Accompanied variously by Billy Baker, fiddle; Lamar Grier, banjo; David Grisman, mandolin; Pete Kuykendall, mandolin; Chubby Wise, fiddle.

Walkin' in My Sleep
Can't You Hear Me Calling?
Darling Nellie across theSea
Difficult Run
Coal Miner's Blues. Reissued also on *Classic Mountain Songs from Smithsonian Folkways,* Smithsonian/Folkways 40094, 2002.
Gabriel's Call
Just Another Broken Heart
Take Me Back to Tulsa
Who's That Knocking?
Cowboy Jim
Long Black Veil

Lee Highway Blues
Lover's Return
Gonna Lay Down My Old Guitar
I Hear a Sweet Voice Calling

*Folk Festival of the Smokies,* vol.1. Traditional 528. Released ca. 1972. Hazel Dickens appears on two tracks:

Little Margaret. Hazel Dickens, vocal
Sunny Side of Life. Hazel Dickens, vocal; Alice Gerrard, vocal; Mike Seeger; Tracy Schwarz

*Strange Creek Singers.* Arhoolie 4004. Released 1972. Reissued as Arhoolie 9003 in 1997. Hazel Dickens, vocal, bass; Alice Gerrard, vocal, guitar; Lamar Grier, banjo; Tracy Schwarz, vocal, Dobro, fiddle, guitar; Mike Seeger, vocal, autoharp, banjo, fiddle, guitar, harmonica, mandolin.

When I Can Read My Titles Clear
In the Pines
Sunny Side of Life
Poor Old Dirt Farmer
Sally Ann
I Truly Understand That You Love Another Man
Old Black Choo Choo
Today Has Been a Lonesome Day
No Never No
New River Train
Get Acquainted Waltz
Will the Circle Be Unbroken
Black Lung
Difficult Run Part 2

*Come All You Coal Miners.* Rounder 4005. Released 1972. Various artists. The following four tracks by Hazel Dickens are reissued on *Coal Mining Women.* Rounder CD 4025. Hazel Dickens, vocal, accompanied by John Kaparakis, guitar; Ralph Rinzler, mandolin; Bob Siggins, banjo.

The Yablonski Murder
Black Lung
The Mannington Mine Disaster
Clay County Miner

*Won't You Come and Sing for Me.* Folkways 31034. Released 1973. Except for "Weary Lonesome Blues," reissued with *Who's That Knocking,* Folkways 31055, as *Pioneering Women of Bluegrass,* Smithsonian/Folkways 40065. Hazel Dickens, vocal, bass, guitar; Alice Gerrard, vocal, banjo, guitar. Accompanied variously by Billy Baker, fiddle; Lamar Grier, banjo; David Grisman, vocal, mandolin; Mike Seeger, guitar; Fred Weisz, vocal, guitar.

They're at Rest Together. Reissued as TB Blues.
The One I Love Is Gone
Won't You Come and Sing for Me? Reissued also on *Classic Bluegrass,* vol. 2, Smithsonian/Folkways 40163, 2005.
Sugar Tree Stomp
Train on the Island
Memories of Mother and Dad
Mommy Please Stay Home with Me
A Distant Land to Roam
John Henry
I Just Got Wise
A Tiny Broken Heart. Reissued also on *Classic Bluegrass from Smithsonian Folkways,* Smithsonian/Folkways 40092, 2002.
Weary Lonesome Blues

*Hazel and Alice.* Rounder 0027. Released 1973. Hazel Dickens, vocal, bass, guitar; Alice Gerrard, vocal, autoharp, banjo, guitar. Accompanied variously by Lamar Grier, banjo; Tracy Schwarz, Dobro, fiddle; Mike Seeger, bass, fiddle, guitar, mandolin, mouth harp.

Mining Camp Blues
Hello Stranger
The Green Rolling Hills of West Virginia
A Few More Years Shall Roll. Reissued on *The Angels Are Singing: A Women's Bluegrass Gospel Collection,* Rounder 0485, 2002.
Two Soldiers. Reissued on *Mountain Journey: Stars of Old Time Music,* Rounder 0546, 2005.
The Sweetest Gift, a Mother's Smile. Reissued on *Mama's Hand: Bluegrass and Mountain Songs about Mother.* Rounder 0507, 2002.
Tomorrow I'll Be Gone
My Better Years
Custom Made Woman Blues

Don't Put Her Down, You Helped Put Her There
You Gave Me a Song
Pretty Bird. Reissued on *Old-Time Music on the Air,* vol. 1, Rounder 0331, 1994; *Mountain Journey: Stars of Old Time Music,* Rounder 0546, 2005.
Gallop to Kansas.

*The Second Annual Farewell Reunion.* Mercury 685. Released 1973. Mike Seeger and friends. Hazel Dickens appears on one track. Hazel Dickens, vocal, bass; Alice Gerrard, vocal, guitar; Tracy Schwarz, vocal.

*1st Annual Brandywine Mountain Music Convention.* Heritage (Galax) 006. Released 1975. Hazel Dickens appears on one track.

Little Margaret. Hazel Dickens, vocal.

*Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard.* Rounder 0054. Released 1976. Hazel Dickens, vocal, bass, guitar; Alice Gerrard, vocal, banjo, guitar. Accompanied variously by Mike Auldridge, Dobro; Buddy Charlton, steel; Penny Cohen, dulcimer; Richard Crooks, drums; Tom Gray, bass; Lamar Grier, banjo, kazoo; Kenny Kosek, fiddle; Roger Mason, bass; John Nagy, guitar; Carl Nelson, Fiddle, piano; Arvin Noel, drums; Stacey Phillips, Dobro; Tracy Schwarz, Fiddle, resonator national guitar; Mike Seeger, banjo, banjo-mandolin, bass, fiddle, guitar, mandolin.

Let That Liar Alone
When I Loved You
Working Girl Blues. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529.
West Virginia My Home
Mama's Gonna Stay. Reissued on *Mama's Hand: Bluegrass and Mountain Songs About Mother,* Rounder 0507, 2002.
Montana Cowboy. Reissued on *Rounder Bluegrass,* vol. 1, 1987; *Hand-Picked: 25 Years of Bluegrass on Rounder Records,* Rounder AN22, 1995; *The Real Music Box: 25 Years of Rounder Records,* Rounder AN 25, 1995; *Dark Is the Night,* Rounder, 2001; *True Bluegrass: Over 60 Minutes of Classic Bluegrass,* Rounder 11615, 2002; *O Sister 2: A Women's Bluegrass Collection,* Rounder 0506, 2002.
Mean Papa Blues
Nice Like That
Mary Johnson

Ramblin' Woman
Beaufort County Jail
Banjo Picking Girl. Reissued on *Rounder Banjo,* Rounder 11542, 1987; *Roots Music: An American Journey,* Rounder 0501, 2001
James Alley Blues
True Life Blues. Reissued on *O Sister! The Women's Bluegrass Collection,* Rounder 0499, 2001.

*Matewan.* Released 1980. Various artists. Hazel Dickens appears on four tracks. Hazel Dickens, vocal. Accompanied variously by John Curtis, guitar; Gerry Milnes, fiddle; Mining community in the film.

Fire in the Hole
Gathering Storm
What a Friend We Have in Jesus
Hills of Galilee

*Hard-Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People.* Rounder 0126. Released 1980. Hazel Dickens, vocal. Accompanied variously by John Baker, vocal, guitar; Russ Barenberg, guitar; Scott Billington, harmonica; Nancy Blake, cello; Norman Blake, guitar; James Bryan, fiddle; Harley Campbell, bass; Ray Edenton, guitar; Matt Glaser, fiddle; Lloyd Green, pedal steel; Jim Guttman, bass; Carolyn Kellock, bass; Barry Mitterhoff, mandolin; Carl Nelson, fiddle; "Pig" Robbins, piano; Buddy Spicher, fiddle; Evan Stover, Fiddle; Henry Strzelecki, bass; Ron Thomason, mandolin; Tony Trischka, banjo; Roger Williams, Dobro; Gene Yellin, vocal, guitar.

Busted. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529.
Aragon Mill
Old Calloused Hands. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529.
Scraps from Your Tale
Out among the Stars
West Virginia My Home. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529; *Rounder Old-Time Music,* Rounder 11510, 1987; *Hand-Picked: 25 Years of Bluegrass on Rounder Records,* Rounder AN22, 1995; *The Real Music Box: 25 Years of Rounder Records,* Rounder AN25, 1995.
Tomorrow's Already Lost
Lonesome Pine Special

Lost Patterns
Beautiful Hills of Galilee. Reissued on *The Stained Glass Hour: Bluegrass and Old Timey Gospel Music,* Rounder 11563, 1991.
Rocking Chair Blues
They'll Never Keep Us Down

*I Really Care,* Rounder 0162. Released 1983. Phyllis Boyens, vocal. Hazel Dickens sings harmony on two songs.

Last Old Shovel
Dream of a Miner's Child

*They'll Never Keep Us Down: Women's Coal Mining Songs.* Rounder 4012. Released 1984. Various artists. The following tracks by Hazel Dickens are reissued on *Coal Mining Women,* Rounder 4025. Hazel Dickens, vocal. Accompanied variously by Jerry Douglas, Dobro; Tommy Goldsmith, guitar; Roy Huskey, bass; Blaine Sprouse, fiddle.

Coal Mining Woman
Coal Miner's Grave
Coal Tattoo
They'll Never Keep Us Down
Dream of a Miner's Child. Phyllis Boyens, vocal; Hazel Dickens, vocal harmony. Reissued also on *O Sister 2: A Women's Bluegrass Collection,* Rounder 0506, 2002, and *Long Journey Home: Songs of the Stanley Brothers,* Wal-Mart Custom CD.

*By the Sweat of My Brow.* Rounder 0200. Released 1984. Hazel Dickens, vocal. Accompanied variously by Scott Billington, harmonica; Phyllis Boyes, vocal; Dudley Connell, vocal, guitar, Jerry Douglas, Dobro, lap steel; Joe Drumright, banjo: Jeanne French, vocal; Tommy Goldsmith, guitar; Roy Huskey, Jr., bass; Karl Lauber, banjo; David McLaughlin, vocal, fiddle, mandolin; Larry Robbins, bass; Blaine Sprouse, fiddle; Eddie Stubbs, fiddle; Richard Underwood, banjo.

Beyond the River Bend. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529, and On Rounder Folk 1, Rykodisc, 1985, and *Rounder Folk,* Rykodisc 20018, 1986.
Only the Lonely. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529.
By the Sweat of My Brow

Mama's Hand. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529; *Hand-Picked: 25 Years of Bluegrass on Rounder Records,* Rounder AN22, 1995; *The Real Music Box: 25 Years of Rounder Records,* Rounder AN25, 1995; *Mama's Hand: Bluegrass and Mountain Songs about Mother,* Rounder 0507, 2002.
Little Lenaldo. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529.
Are They Gonna Make Us Outlaws Again?
Go Away with Me
Your Greedy Heart
Scars from an Old Love. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529.
The Ballad of Ira Hayes
Old and in the Way. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529.
Here Today and Gone Tomorrow. Reissued on *Blue Ribbon Bluegrass,* Rounder AN11, 1993; *Songs of the Louvin Brothers,* Rounder EDIS7034, 1997.

*It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song.* Rounder 0226. Released 1986. Hazel Dickens, vocal. Accompanied variously by Jim Buchanan, fiddle; Kathy Chiavola, vocal; Mike Compton, mandolin; Jerry Douglas, Dobro; Glen Duncan, vocals, fiddle; Pat Enright, vocal, guitar; Tommy Goldsmith, guitar; Roy Huskey, Jr., bass; Allen Shelton, banjo; Blaine Sprouse, fiddle; Cheryl White Warren, vocal.

You'll Get No More of Me. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529.
A Few Old Memories. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529.
Here Today, Gone Tomorrow. Reissued on *The Stained Glass Hour: Bluegrass And Old Timey Gospel Music,* Rounder 11563, 1991; *Bluegrass Mountain Style: Over 60 Minutes of Classic Bluegrass from Rounder Records,* Rounder 11616, 2002.
Hills of Home. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529; *Hills of Home: 25 Years of Folk Music on Rounder Records,* Rounder AN16; *The Real Music Box: 25 Years of Rounder Records,* Rounder AN25, 1995; *Blue Trail of Sorrow,* Rounder 0500, 2001; *The Old Home Place: Bluegrass and Old-Time Mountain Music,* Rounder 0514, 2003.
Don't Bother to Cry. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529.

It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529.
Only a Hobo
Will Jesus Wash the Bloodstains from Your Hands
California Cottonfields
Play Us a Waltz. Reissued on *A Few Old Memories,* Rounder 11529.

*A Few Old Memories.* Rounder 11529. Released 1987. Tracks reissued from *Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard,* Rounder 0054 (*); *Hard-Hitting Songs for Hard-Hit People,* Rounder 0126 (**); *By the Sweat of My Brow,* Rounder 0200 (***); *It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song,* Rounder 0226(****); *They'll Never Keep Us Down,* Rounder 4012, 1984(*****).

Hazel Dickens, vocal. Accompanied by various other singers and musicians.
A Few Old Memories****
Beyond the River Bend***
Busted**
Old and in the Way***
It's Hard to Tell the Singer from the Song****
Don't Bother to Cry****
Hills of Home****
Pretty Bird. New recording made in 1987.
Only the Lonely***
Coal Tattoo*****
Little Lenaldo***
Old Calloused Hands**
Scars from an Old Love***
You'll Get No More of Me****
Mama's Hand***
Working Girl Blues*
West Virginia My Home**
Play Us a Waltz****

*Don't Mourn—Organize! Songs of Labor Songwriter Joe Hill.* Smithsonian/Folkways 20026. Released 1990. Hazel Dickens appears on one track.

The Rebel Girl. Hazel Dickens, vocal; Tom Adams, banjo; Dudley Connell, guitar; David McLaughlin, fiddle, mandolin; Marshall

Wilborn, bass. Reissued on Classic Bluegrass from Smithsonian Folkways, Smithsonian/Folkways 40092, 2002.

*Bill Monroe and the Bluegrass Boys: Live Recordings 1956–1969, Off the Record,* Vol. 1. Smithsonian/Folkways 40063. Released 1993. Hazel Dickens appears on one track.

Roll in My Sweet Baby's Arms. Bill Monroe, vocal, mandolin. Accompanied by Hazel Dickens, vocal; Richard Greene, fiddle; Tex Logan, fiddle; Peter Rowan, guitar.

*Third Annual Farewell Reunion.* Rounder 0313. Released 1994. Mike Seeger and friends. Hazel Dickens appears on one track.

They're at Rest Together. Mike Seeger, vocal, mandolin; Hazel Dickens, vocal, guitar; Tom Gray, bass.

*Nashville at Newport.* Vanguard 77016. Released 1995. Various artists. Hazel Dickens appears on three tracks. Hazel Dickens, vocal, bass; Alice Gerrard, vocal, guitar. Accompanied by David Grisman, mandolin; Smiley Hobbs, banjo; Tex Logan, fiddle.

Walking in My Sleep
A Tiny Broken Heart
The One I Love Is Gone

*Pioneering Women of Bluegrass.* Smithsonian/Folkways 40065. Released 1997. Reissued from *Who's That Knocking?,* Folkways 31055, and *Won't You Come and Sing for Me?,* Folkways 31034. Hazel Dickens, Alice Gerrard, and various other artists.

*Coal Mining Women.* Rounder 4025. Released 1987. Various artists. Hazel Dickens appears on the following tracks reissued from *Come All You Coal Miners,* Rounder 4005(*) and *They'll Never Keep Us Down,* Rounder 4012(**).

Coal Mining Woman (**)
The Yablonski Murder(*)
Coal Miner's Grave(**)
Black Lung(*)
Mannington Mine Disaster(*)

Clay County Miner(*)
Clara Sullivan's Letter. New Recording. Hazel Dickens, unaccompanied vocal.
Coat Tattoo. New recording. Hazel Dickens, vocal, accompanied by Jerry Douglas, Dobro; Pat Enright, guitar; Bela Fleck, banjo; Mark Hembree, bass; Blaine Sprouse, fiddle; Roland White, mandolin.

*Songs of the Louvin Brothers.* Rounder 7034. Released 1997. Hazel Dickens with the Johnson Mountain Boys.

Here Today and Gone Tomorrow

*Heart of a Singer.* Rounder 0443, CS 0443. Released 1998. Hazel Dickens, Carol Elizabeth Jones, and Ginny Hawker, vocals. Accompanied variously by Dudley Connell, guitar; Pete Kennedy, guitar; Barry Mitterhoff, mandolin; Bruce Molsky, banjo, guitar; Lynn Morris, banjo; Ron Stewart, banjo, fiddle, mandolin; Marshall Wilborn, bass.

Forsaken Lover
Lay Me to Rest
Not a Word of That Be Said. Reissued on *Mountain Journey: Stars of Old Time Music,* Rounder 0546, 2005.
Old Memories Mean Nothing to Me
Love Me or Leave Me Alone. Reissued on *O Sister 2: A Women's Bluegrass Collection,* Rounder 0506, 2002.
Times Are Not What They Used to Be. Reissued on *O Sister 2: A Women's Bluegrass Collection,* Rounder 0506, 2002; *Mountain Journey: Stars of Old Time Music,* Rounder 0546, 2005.
Faded Pressed Rose. Reissued on *The Angels Are Singing: A Women's Bluegrass Gospel Collection,* Rounder 0485, 2002.
Jealous Heart
Old River. Reissued on *O Sister! The Women's Bluegrass Collection,* Rounder 0499, 2001.
I Can't Find Your Love Anymore. Reissued on *O Sister! The Women's Bluegrass Collection,* Rounder 0499, 2001.
Let Me Go
Time Is Winding Up
Comin' Down from God. Reissued on *O Sister! The Women's Bluegrass Collection,* Rounder 0499, 2001.

*Songcatcher*. Vanguard Combustion 79586–2. Released 2001. Various artists. Hazel Dickens appears on one track.

Conversation with Death. Hazel Dickens, vocal. Two other singers, David Patrick Kelly and Bobby McMillon, also sang versions of the song.

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HAZEL DICKENS is an Appalachian singer and songwriter known for her powerful vocal style, superb musicianship, feminist country songs, union anthems, and blue-collar laments. She has performed widely in this country and abroad and has appeared on many recordings and in a number of films.

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